THE CHAMPIONS CLASSIC

KANE
ADKINS

THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

MARVEL

THE CHAMPIONS CLASSIC

WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?

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WRITERS **Tony Isabella, Bill Mantlo, Chris Claremont, Jim Shooter & Roger Stern with John Byrne**

PENCILERS **Don Heck, George Tuska, Bob Hall, John Byrne & Sal Buscema**

INKERS **Mike Esposito, John Tartaglione, Vince Colletta, Bruce Patterson, Bob Layton, Frank Giacoia, Don Perlin, Pablo Marcos, John Byrne & Dave Hunt with Duffy Vohland**

COLORISTS **Petra Goldberg, Phil Rachelson, George Roussos, Janice Cohen, Don Warfield, Glynis Wein, Irene Vartanoff & Mary Ellen Beveridge with Bruce Patterson**

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Special Thanks to **Daron Jensen**

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INTRODUTION BY RALPH MACCHIO

I hadn't yet officially started at Marvel back in 1975, but I was up at the office enough to have heard word of a new super-group to be introduced; one whose members were so dissimilar as to put even the Defenders to shame. I think it wasn't until the last page of issue four that they even named themselves the Champions. Consider this lineup: Hercules, the Black Widow, Angel, Iceman and Ghost Rider. What could possibly draw together such a disparate assemblage? Nothing much except a war among the Olympian gods! More about that later. Instead, let's focus on the individuals and what connects them. Hercules and the Widow were both Avengers, thus familiar with one another. Likewise, Iceman and Angel were both X-Men and brothers-in-arms. The real wild card was the supernatural Ghost Rider. When I heard this potential lineup for the new series, I was stunned. I wondered where they'd be headquartered. Who would be their leader? Well, as everyone else, I had to wait for the book to come out, although I did see original art pages being corrected in the fabled Bullpen. I couldn't wait for this thing to start!

Tony Isabella conceived of the *Champions* and scripted most of the first eight issues before turning it over to the capable Bill Mantlo. Tony, whose creation for our Distinguished Competition, Black Lightning, is currently a huge hit on television, is someone who was truly devoted to Marvel back in the 1970s. If I recall correctly, he was one of a handful of freelancers and staffers back then who almost literally lived at the House of Ideas, when our offices were located at 575 Madison Avenue. Hard to believe, but several devoted Marvel employees would bring sleeping bags up to the office and spend days or weeks up there, proofreading or scripting comics. Talk about a total lifestyle. Tony began the *Champions* with a bang, involving the protagonists in a conflict with the awesome Olympian gods. Hercules, being the son of Zeus, was a natural fit for such an epic; the other characters, not so much so. But the talented Mr. T. found a natural way for all of them to be in the same place so they could partake of the adventure and interact. Also, a nice innovation was setting the series out in sunny Los Angeles, California. This was a big deal because almost every other Marvel series was set in Manhattan or some nearby location. In rereading the initial stories for this introduction, I was very impressed with how effortlessly Tony was able to put the players in place. He also picked up on a significant plot point from the classic Lee/Kirby run on *Mighty Thor* and used it as a basis for the first story. I liked that. We had something brand new with a strong tie to something established. As you'll note, the beautifully drawn first cover by Gil Kane placed the Prince of Power front and center in an aggressive pose that let you know he was a central figure.

Speaking of artwork, the *Champions* had several pencilers during its seventeen-issue duration. Initially, Marvel veteran Don Heck drew the first few issues. Don is best known for the sleek, sophisticated look he gave to *Iron Man* in the 1960s; as adept at the super-heroic hijinks of the Golden Avenger as he was at drawing the billionaire world of Tony Stark. Don did a fine penciling job on this title, as well, though I felt he wasn't as comfortable with the godly clashes and sense of grandeur the first storyline demanded. Not quite his forte, in my opinion. George Tuska, who followed Don on *Champions* and also penciled a mean *Iron Man*, got a bit closer to the mark in his stay. I think easily his best artwork in this stellar collection is the reprinted *Iron Man Annual #4*, in which our intrepid quintet takes on the man with the biggest head in comics: the menacing M.O.D.O.K. Bold, powerful panels grace the pages of this story. It's quite a treat that you'll be glad we included.

It's fascinating how the Champions seem to pop up in other Marvel titles in either the middle of a storyline or helping to conclude one, as in *Super-Villain Team-Up #14*. This story was a doozy as we see our greatest super villain, Victor Von Doom, having, at long last, achieved his goal of world conquest! Unfortunately for poor ol' Doomsy, his method of conquest is so subtle the world doesn't even know it's been taken over. And that's just the beginning. That last issue of *Super-Villain Team-Up* bled over into *Champions #16*, which takes some unexpected twists and has an ending that will leave you breathless. What's intriguing about these crossovers is how seamless they are. You will see that as you glide effortlessly from one title into the other. The man responsible for that is the multitalented scripter Bill Mantlo.

Bill was a highly imaginative gent who I always thought was most underrated. We worked together on *Rom Spaceknight* and had a blast. I'll never forget his begging me to get approval to actually show the Dire Wraiths visually. Something in the contract prevented us from doing it, but we were able to get it changed. I had Walt Simonson design the Dire Wraiths and Bill was ecstatic; totally energized. I considered him a friend and colleague. He began as a staff colorist who made the move over to the writing end of comics and never looked back. He had exceptional tenures on titles as diverse as *Spectacular Spider-Man*, *Micronauts*, *Rom* and *Iron Man*. He and Keith Giffen are also responsible for the creation of a furry little fellow who's become a major motion picture star called Rocket Raccoon. And, in his spare time, the redoubtable Mr. Mantlo also pursued a law degree. I recall him coming up frequently to the Marvel offices with his young son perched atop his shoulders, dropping off scripts or just kibitzing. He was always bouncing new ideas off people. The accident that left him disabled was tragic beyond words. Fortunately, he created a superb body of work, prime examples of which are proudly presented in these pages.

Every team should have a mission statement. The Avengers and X-Men have theirs, but was there one for the Champions? Well, look no further than the last page of *Champions #4* where guest scripter and *X-Men* writer supreme, Chris Claremont, has the Angel say: "To help those who can't help themselves." That's a noble sentiment and strong thread to hold the group together. It seemed strange to me that the guest writer would pen that phrase before departing. But that's the comics biz. That issue is also significant because Hercules really cuts loose against his fellow Champions and we see, however briefly, why he's called the Prince of Power. And you lucky people get to enjoy that slugfest here!

Champions may not have had a long shelf life, but the highly unlikely pairing of its members made it well worth publishing, especially from an experimental point of view. Tony Isabella and, later, Bill Mantlo found ways to make this bizarre combination of characters work in the group context. I felt Bill was just hitting his stride on issue #11, which featured the art and artistry of John Byrne, of *X-Men* fame, who stuck around for a spell and really did the series proud. It took a while, but the characters were starting to gel. You could see relationships developing, personality conflicts coming to the fore and offbeat threats presenting themselves. And the addition of Darkstar and her strange powers was another step in the right direction.

And then it all came to an end. This collection will both delight and tantalize you with what might have been had the series been able to sustain itself for a longer time. The "what if" game is one that, on so many levels, is irresistible. I know that once you've finished reading this colossal collection, you'll be playing it also. Fortunately, there is very good news because the Champions live on in a new iteration, currently being published by Mighty Marvel! For those of us who were present at the creation and saddened by the title's loss, this new version is a satisfying coda. You're missing something if you haven't been picking it up.

Enough with the hard sell, let's head out to the ivy-covered environs of California's UCLA campus with a couple of ex-X-Men, making their way among the halls of academia, when suddenly — but that would be telling. You just jump right in and keep that diploma rolled up and handy, 'cause you never know what other-dimensional deity you'll have to hit over the head with it.

Enjoy,

Ralph Macchio

Ralph Macchio

Ralph Macchio spent over 35 years at Marvel, starting as an assistant editor and later writing Avengers, Thor *and many others. As editor, he oversaw books across the Marvel line, including shepherding the Ultimate line into existence and editing all of Stephen King's Marvel adaptations.*

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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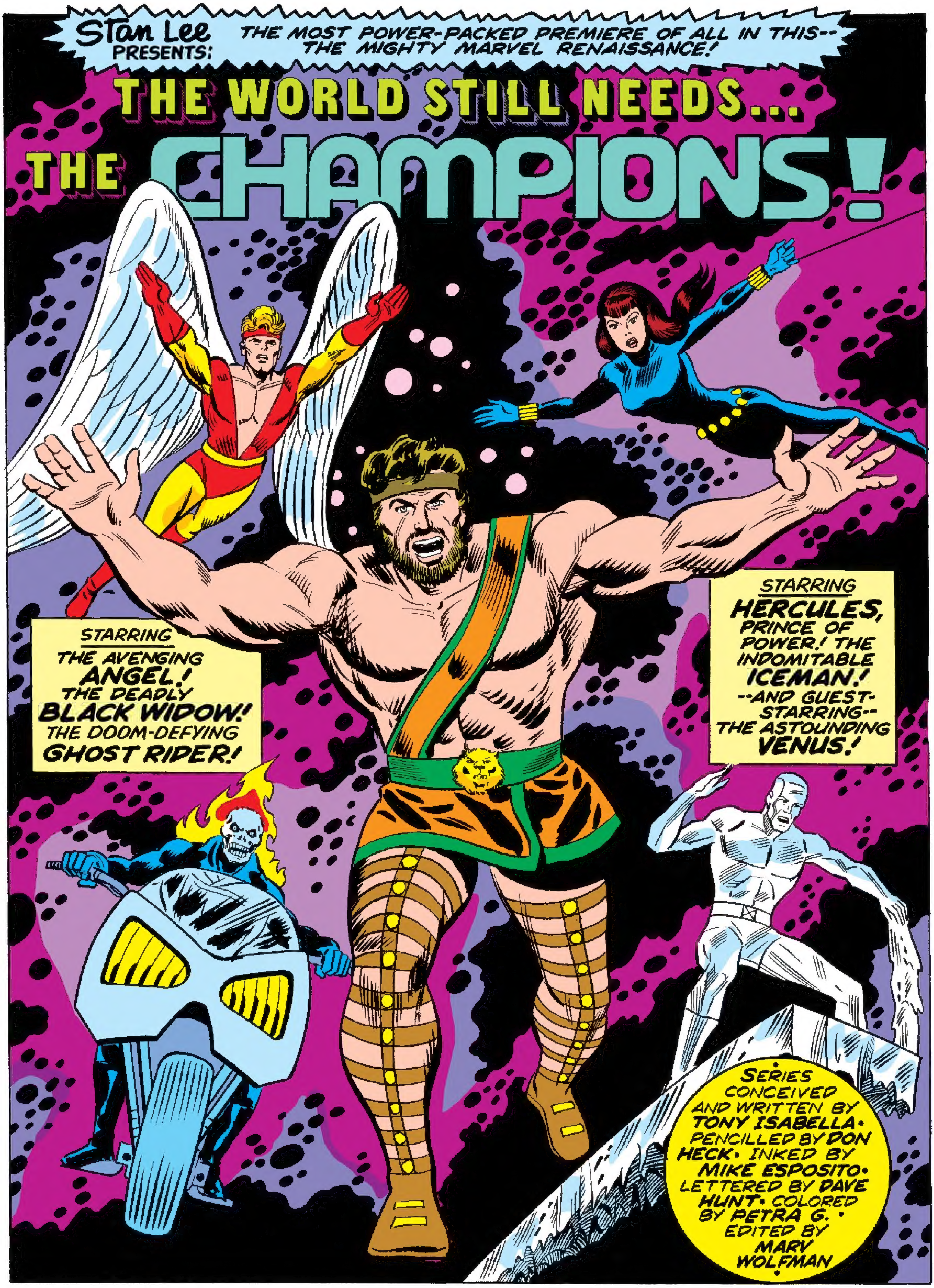
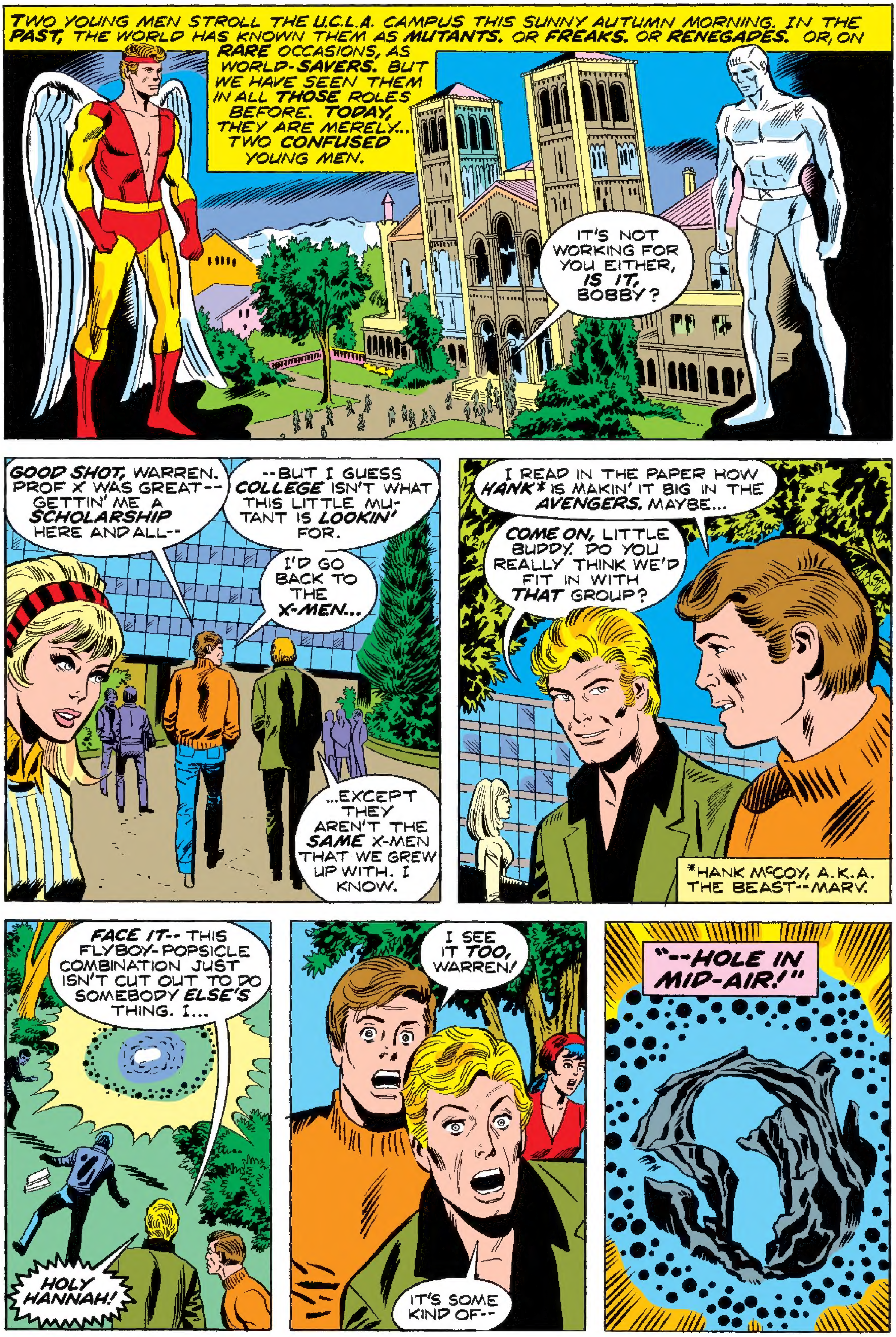
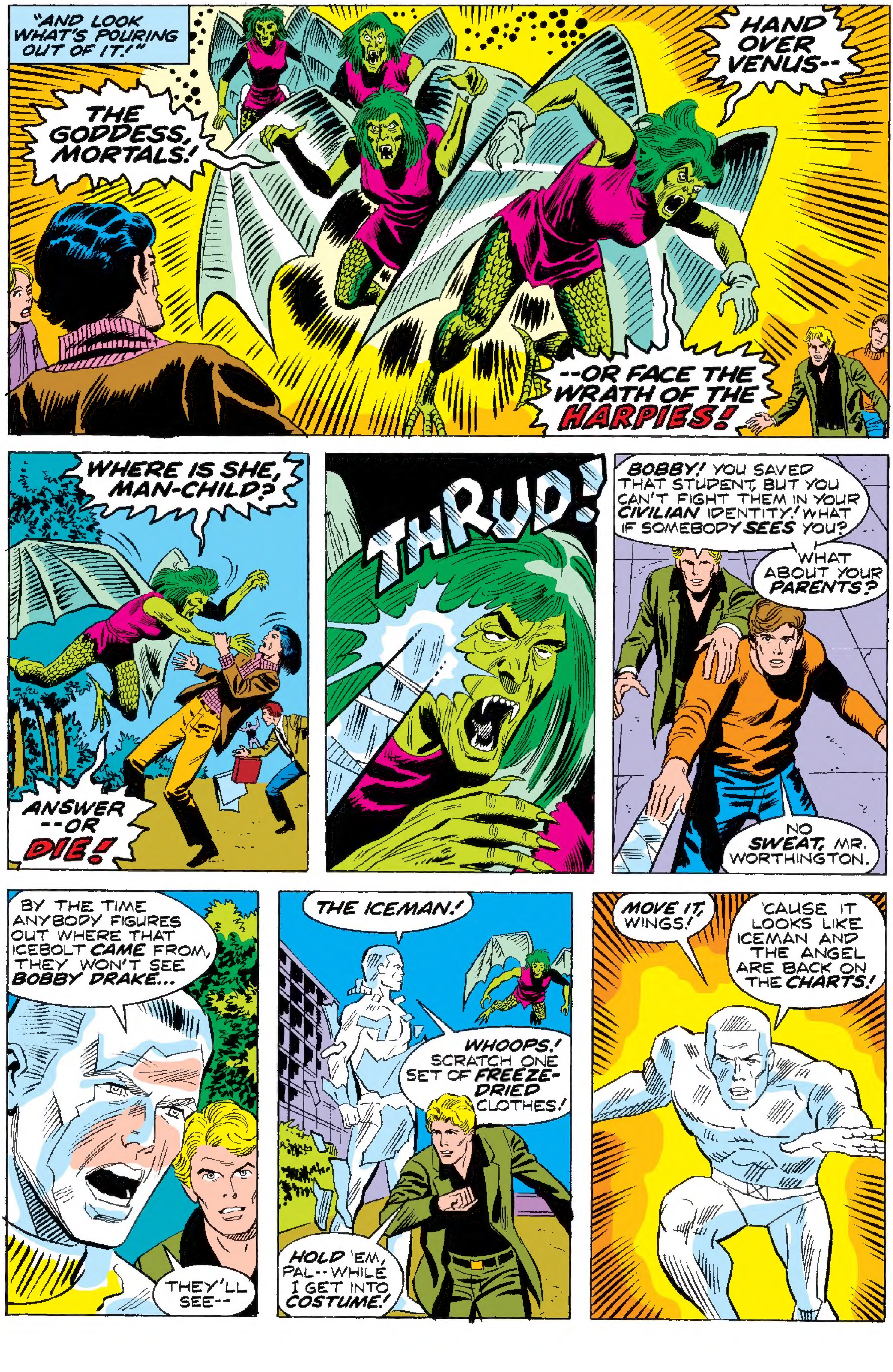
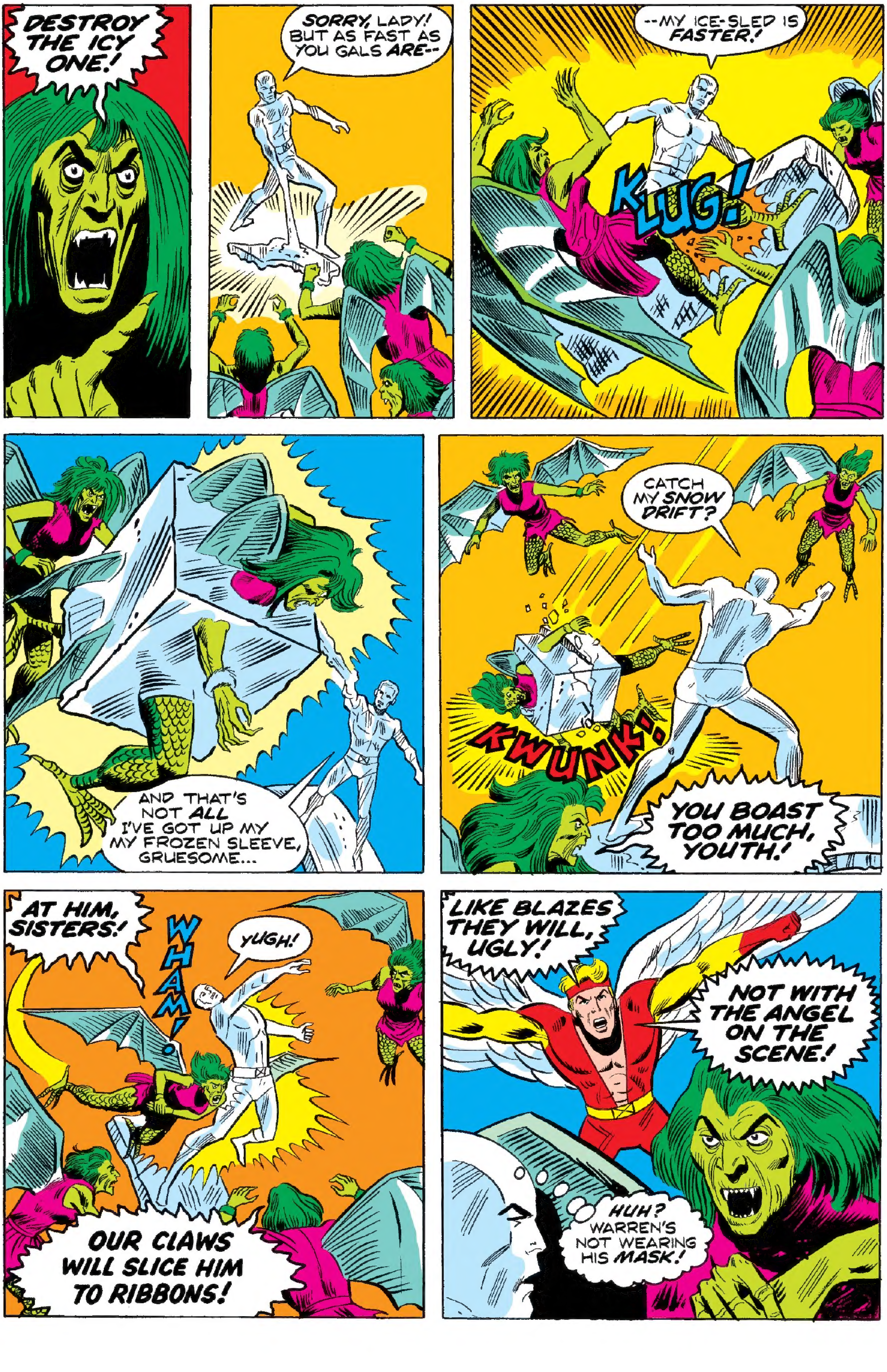
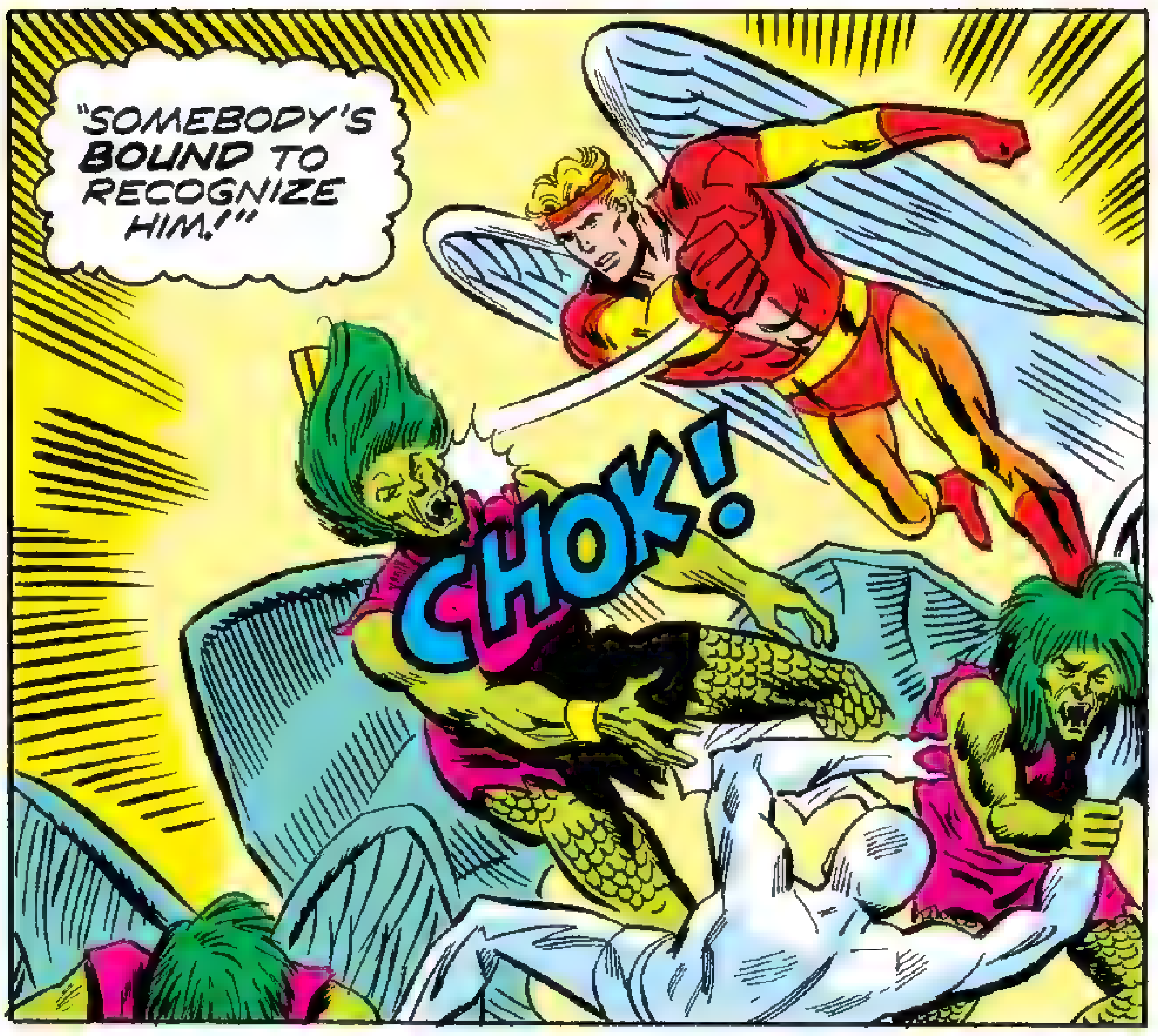
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
ACTION-PACKED FIRST ISSUE!
ONWARD, MY COMRADES! THE TIME HAS COME TO FACE OUR GREATEST FOES!
KANE ADKINS
THIS IS IT!
THE PULSE-POUNDING ORIGIN OF THE MOST SENSATIONAL NEW SUPER-GROUP OF ALL!

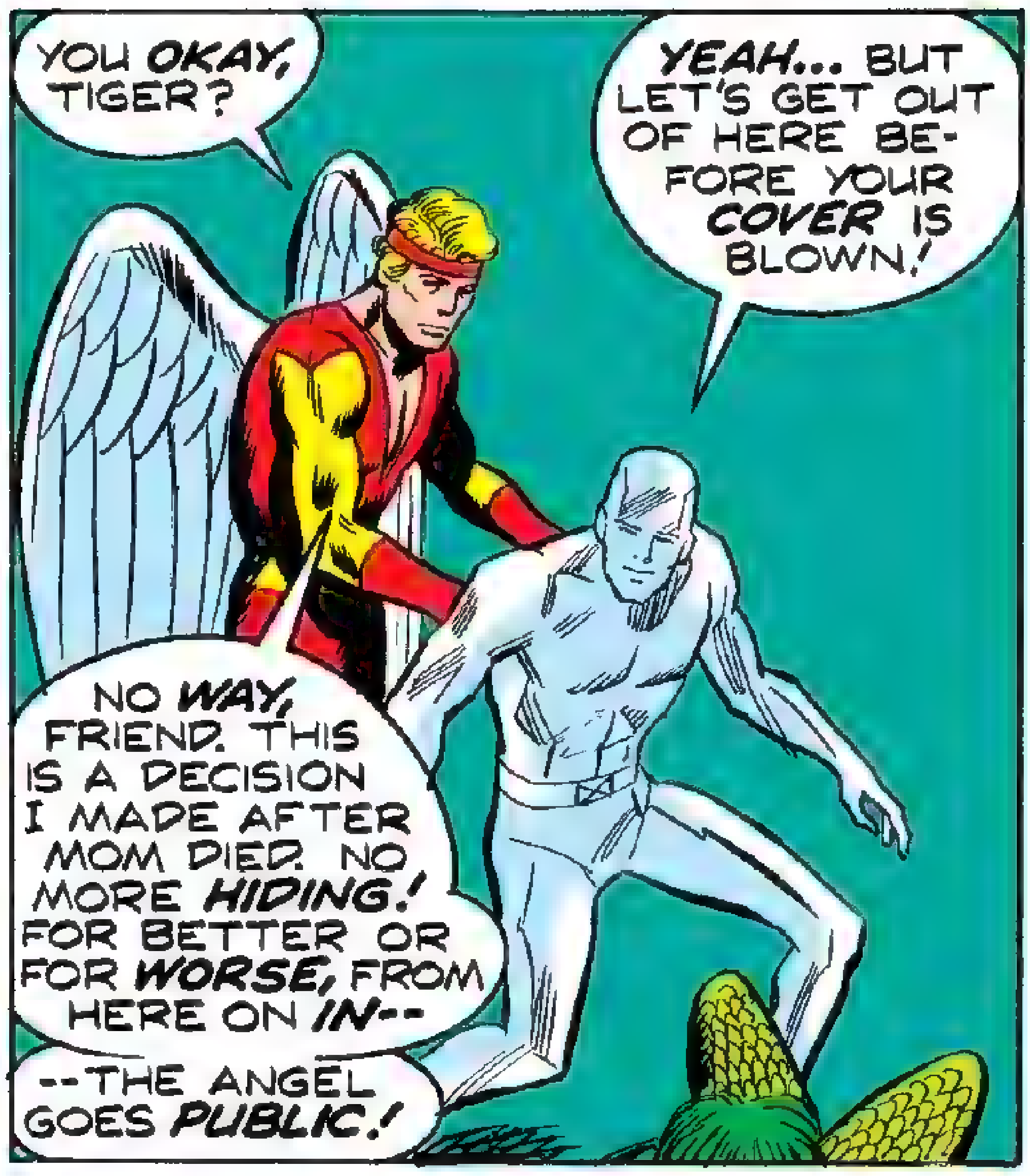

Stan Lee PRESENTS:
THE MOST POWER-PACKED PREMIERE OF ALL IN THIS-- THE MIGHTY MARVEL RENAISSANCE!
THE WORLD STILL NEEDS... THE CHAMPIONS!
STARRING THE AVENGING ANGEL! THE DEADLY BLACK WIDOW! THE DOOM-DEFYING GHOST RIDER!
STARRING HERCULES, PRINCE OF POWER! THE INDOMITABLE ICEMAN! --AND GUEST-STARRING-- THE ASTOUNDING VENUS!
SERIES CONCEIVED AND WRITTEN BY TONY ISABELLA• PENCILLED BY DON HECK• INKED BY MIKE ESPOSITO• LETTERED BY DAVE HUNT• COLORED BY PETRA G.• EDITED BY MARV WOLFMAN

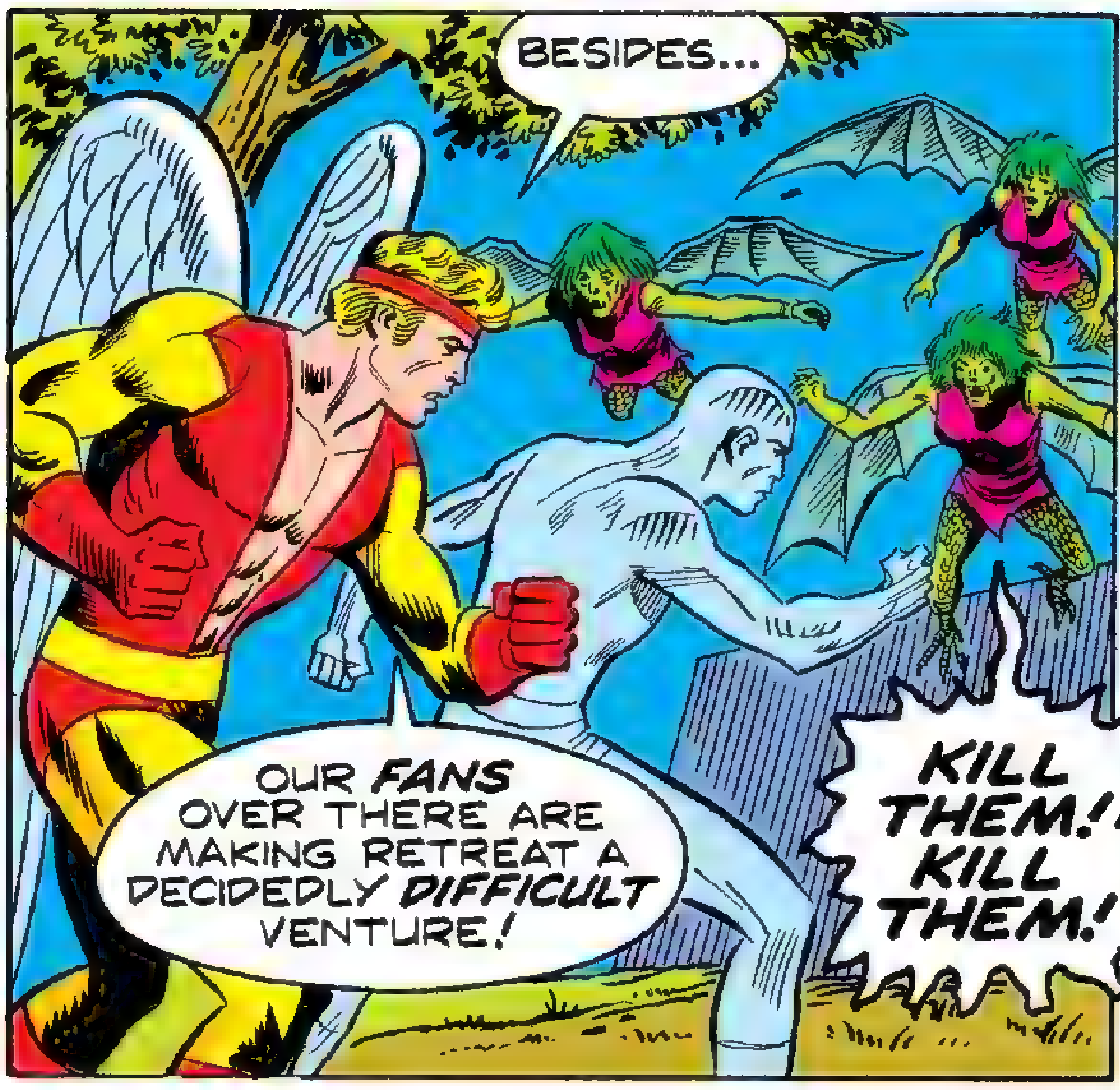

TWO YOUNG MEN STROLL THE U.C.L.A. CAMPUS THIS SUNNY AUTUMN MORNING. IN THE PAST, THE WORLD HAS KNOWN THEM AS MUTANTS. OR FREAKS. OR RENEGADES. OR, ON RARE OCCASIONS, AS WORLD-SAVERS. BUT WE HAVE SEEN THEM IN ALL THOSE ROLES BEFORE. TODAY, THEY ARE MERELY... TWO CONFUSED YOUNG MEN.
IT'S NOT WORKING FOR YOU EITHER, IS IT, BOBBY?
GOOD SHOT, WARREN. PROF X WAS GREAT-- GETTIN' ME A SCHOLARSHIP HERE AND ALL--
--BUT I GUESS COLLEGE ISN'T WHAT THIS LITTLE MUTANT IS LOOKIN' FOR.
I'D GO BACK TO THE X-MEN...
...EXCEPT THEY AREN'T THE SAME X-MEN THAT WE GREW UP WITH. I KNOW.
I READ IN THE PAPER HOW HANK* IS MAKIN' IT BIG IN THE AVENGERS. MAYBE...
COME ON, LITTLE BUDDY. DO YOU REALLY THINK WE'D FIT IN WITH THAT GROUP?
*HANK McCOY, A.K.A. THE BEAST--MARV.
FACE IT-- THIS FLYBOY-POPSICLE COMBINATION JUST ISN'T CUT OUT TO DO SOMEBODY ELSE'S THING. I...
HOLY HANNAH!
I SEE IT TOO, WARREN!
IT'S SOME KIND OF--
"--HOLE IN MID-AIR!"

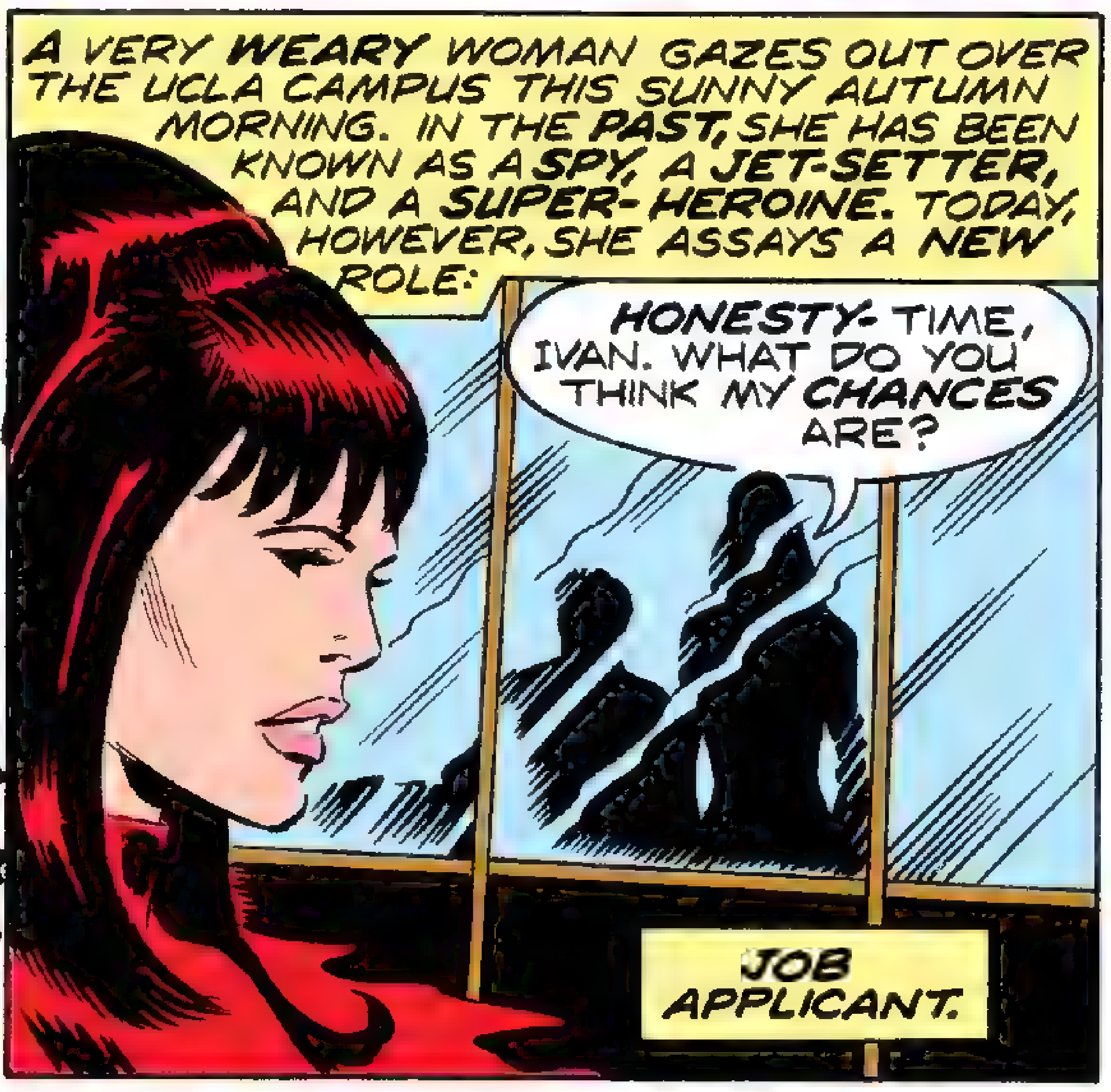

"AND LOOK WHAT'S POURING OUT OF IT!"
THE GODDESS, MORTALS!
HAND OVER VENUS--
--OR FACE THE WRATH OF THE HARPIES!
WHERE IS SHE, MAN-CHILD?
ANSWER --OR DIE!
THRUD!
BOBBY! YOU SAVED THAT STUDENT, BUT YOU CAN'T FIGHT THEM IN YOUR CIVILIAN IDENTITY! WHAT IF SOMEBODY SEES YOU?
WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARENTS?
NO SWEAT, MR. WORTHINGTON.
BY THE TIME ANYBODY FIGURES OUT WHERE THAT ICEBOLT CAME FROM, THEY WON'T SEE BOBBY DRAKE...
THEY'LL SEE--
THE ICEMAN!
WHOOPS! SCRATCH ONE SET OF FREEZE-DRIED CLOTHES!
HOLD 'EM, PAL--WHILE I GET INTO COSTUME!
MOVE IT, WINGS!
'CAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE ICEMAN AND THE ANGEL ARE BACK ON THE CHARTS!

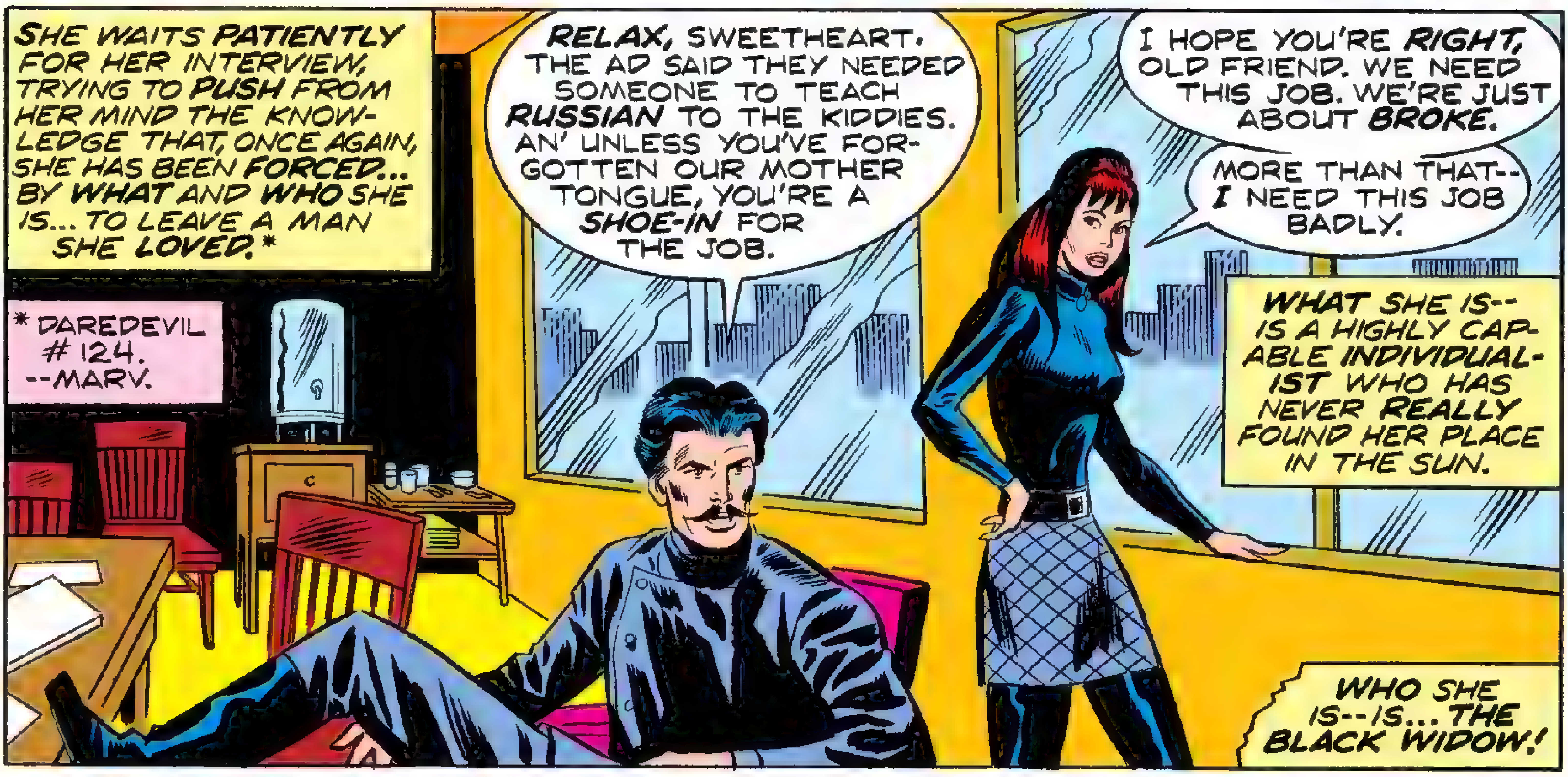

DESTROY THE ICY ONE!
SORRY, LADY! BUT AS FAST AS YOU GALS ARE--
--MY ICE-SLED IS FASTER!
KLUG!
AND THAT'S NOT ALL I'VE GOT UP MY MY FROZEN SLEEVE, GRUESOME...
CATCH MY SNOW DRIFT?
KWUNK!
YOU BOAST TOO MUCH, YOUTH!
AT HIM, SISTERS!
WHAM!
YUGH!
OUR CLAWS WILL SLICE HIM TO RIBBONS!
LIKE BLAZES THEY WILL, UGLY!
NOT WITH THE ANGEL ON THE SCENE!
HUH? WARREN'S NOT WEARING HIS MASK!

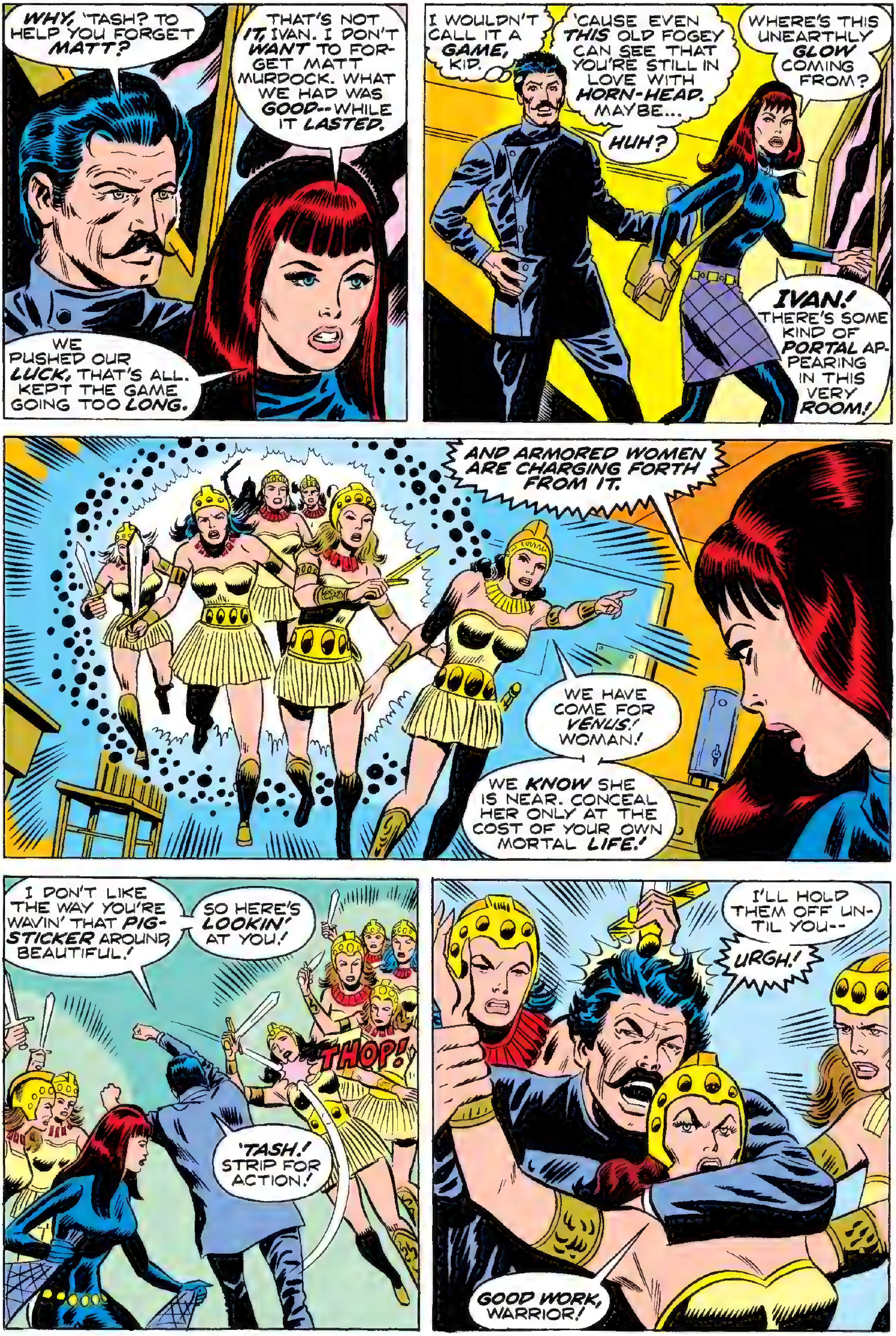

"SOMEBODY'S **BOUND** TO RECOGNIZE HIM!"
CHOK!

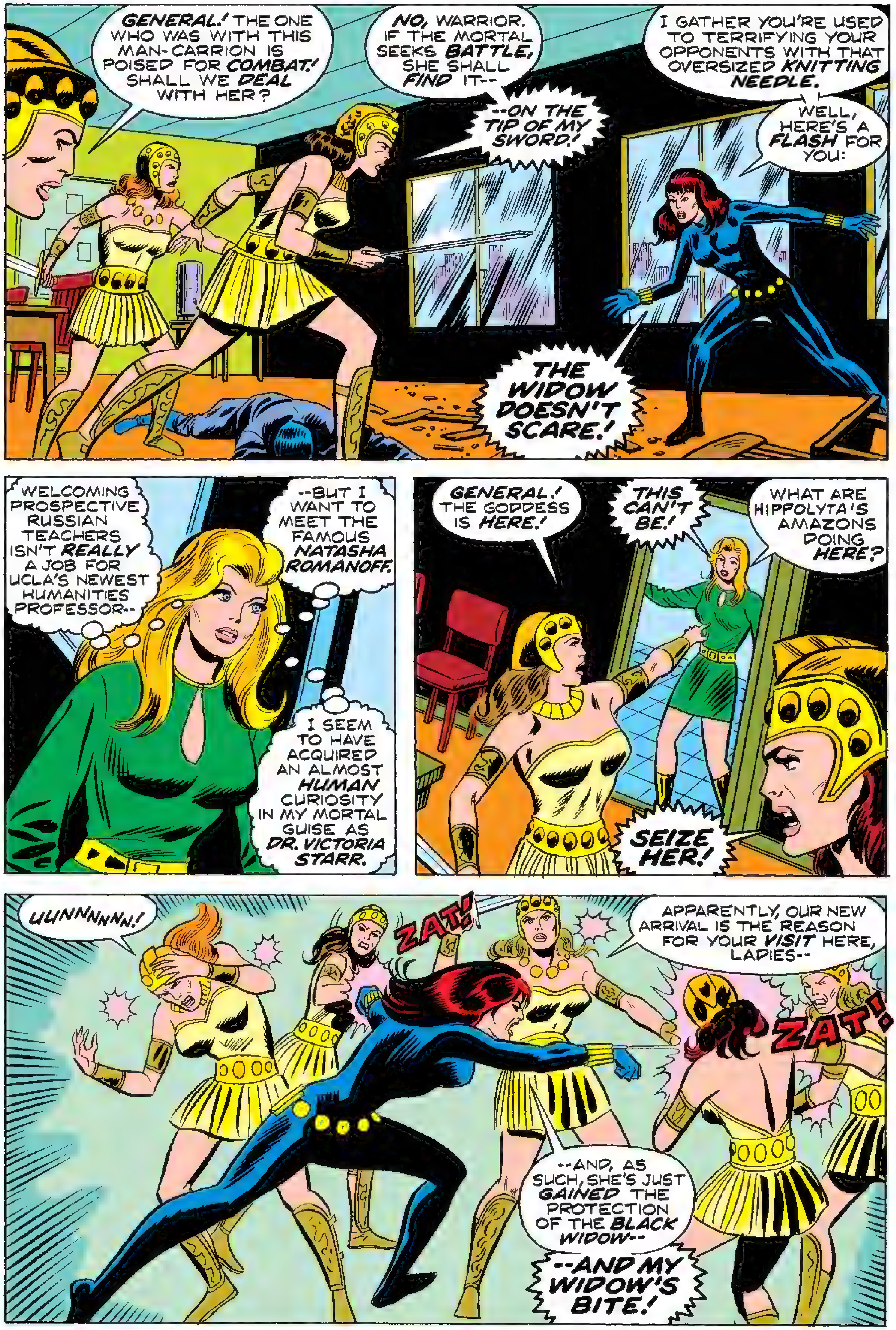

YOU **OKAY,** TIGER?
YEAH... BUT LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE YOUR **COVER** IS BLOWN!
NO **WAY,** FRIEND. THIS IS A DECISION I MADE AFTER MOM DIED. NO MORE **HIDING!** FOR BETTER OR FOR **WORSE,** FROM HERE ON **IN--**
--THE ANGEL GOES **PUBLIC!**

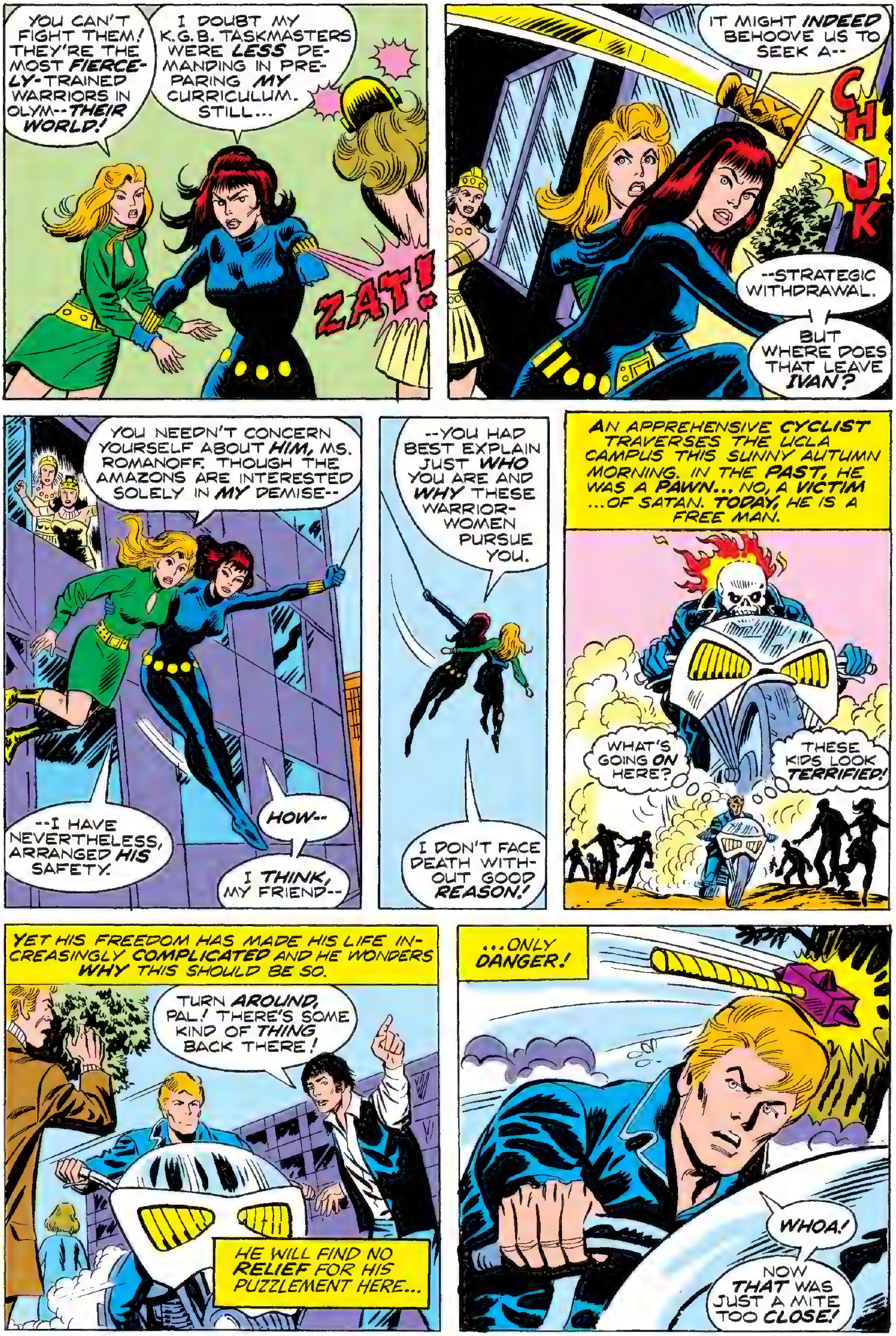

BESIDES...
OUR **FANS** OVER THERE ARE MAKING RETREAT A DECIDEDLY **DIFFICULT** VENTURE!
KILL THEM! KILL THEM!

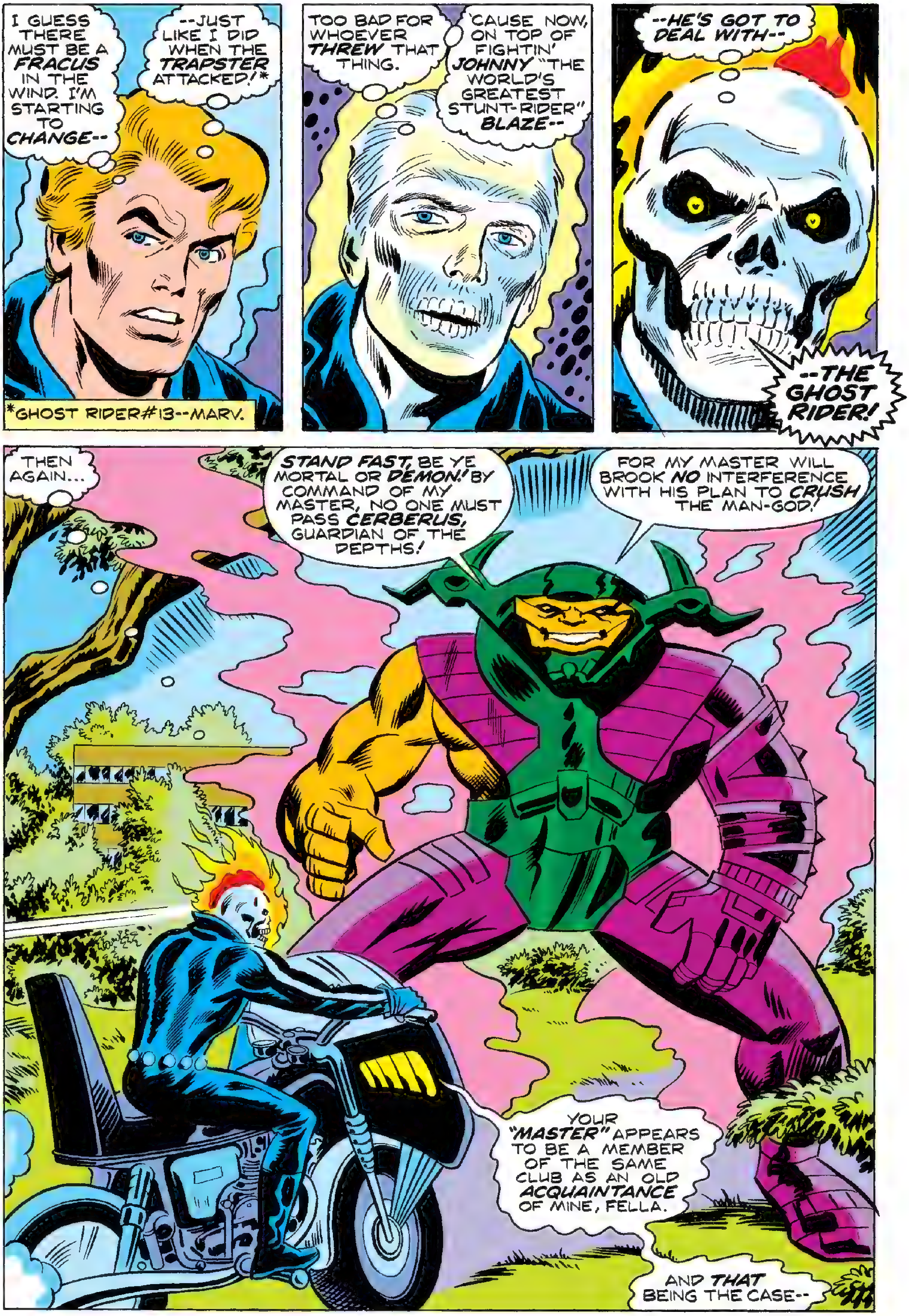

A VERY **WEARY** WOMAN GAZES OUT OVER THE UCLA CAMPUS THIS SUNNY AUTUMN MORNING. IN THE **PAST,** SHE HAS BEEN KNOWN AS A **SPY,** A **JET-SETTER,** AND A **SUPER-HEROINE.** TODAY, HOWEVER, SHE ASSAYS A **NEW** ROLE:
HONESTY-TIME, IVAN. WHAT DO YOU THINK MY **CHANCES** ARE?
JOB APPLICANT.

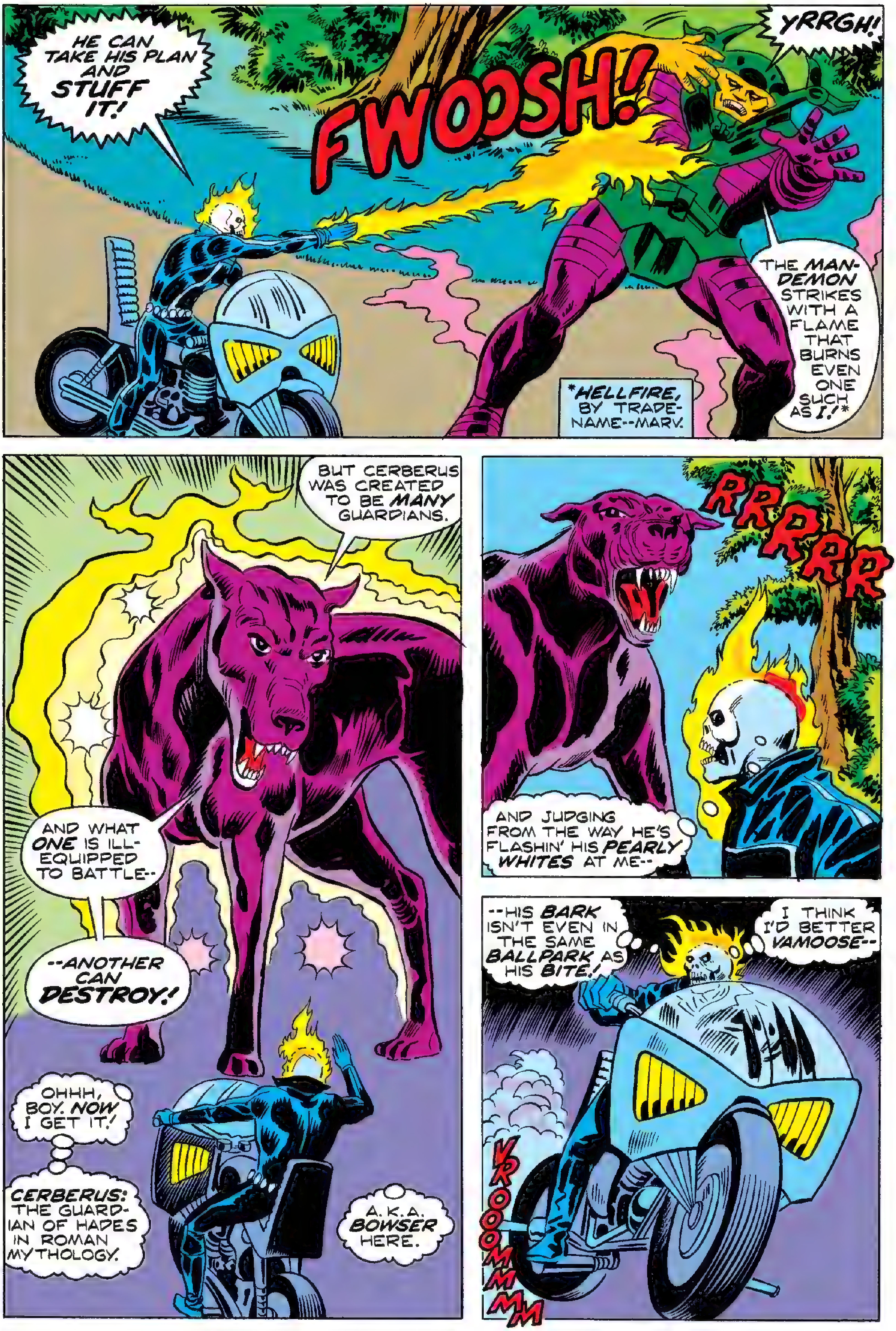

SHE WAITS **PATIENTLY** FOR HER INTERVIEW, TRYING TO **PUSH** FROM HER MIND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT, ONCE AGAIN, SHE HAS BEEN **FORCED...** BY **WHAT** AND **WHO** SHE IS... TO LEAVE A MAN SHE **LOVED.***
* DAREDEVIL #124. --MARV.
RELAX, SWEETHEART. THE AD SAID THEY NEEDED SOMEONE TO TEACH **RUSSIAN** TO THE KIDDIES. AN' UNLESS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN OUR MOTHER TONGUE, YOU'RE A **SHOE-IN** FOR THE JOB.
I HOPE YOU'RE **RIGHT,** OLD FRIEND. WE NEED THIS JOB. WE'RE JUST ABOUT **BROKE.**
MORE THAN THAT-- **I** NEED THIS JOB BADLY.
WHAT SHE IS-- IS A HIGHLY CAPABLE **INDIVIDUALIST** WHO HAS NEVER **REALLY** FOUND HER PLACE IN THE SUN.
WHO SHE IS--IS... **THE BLACK WIDOW!**

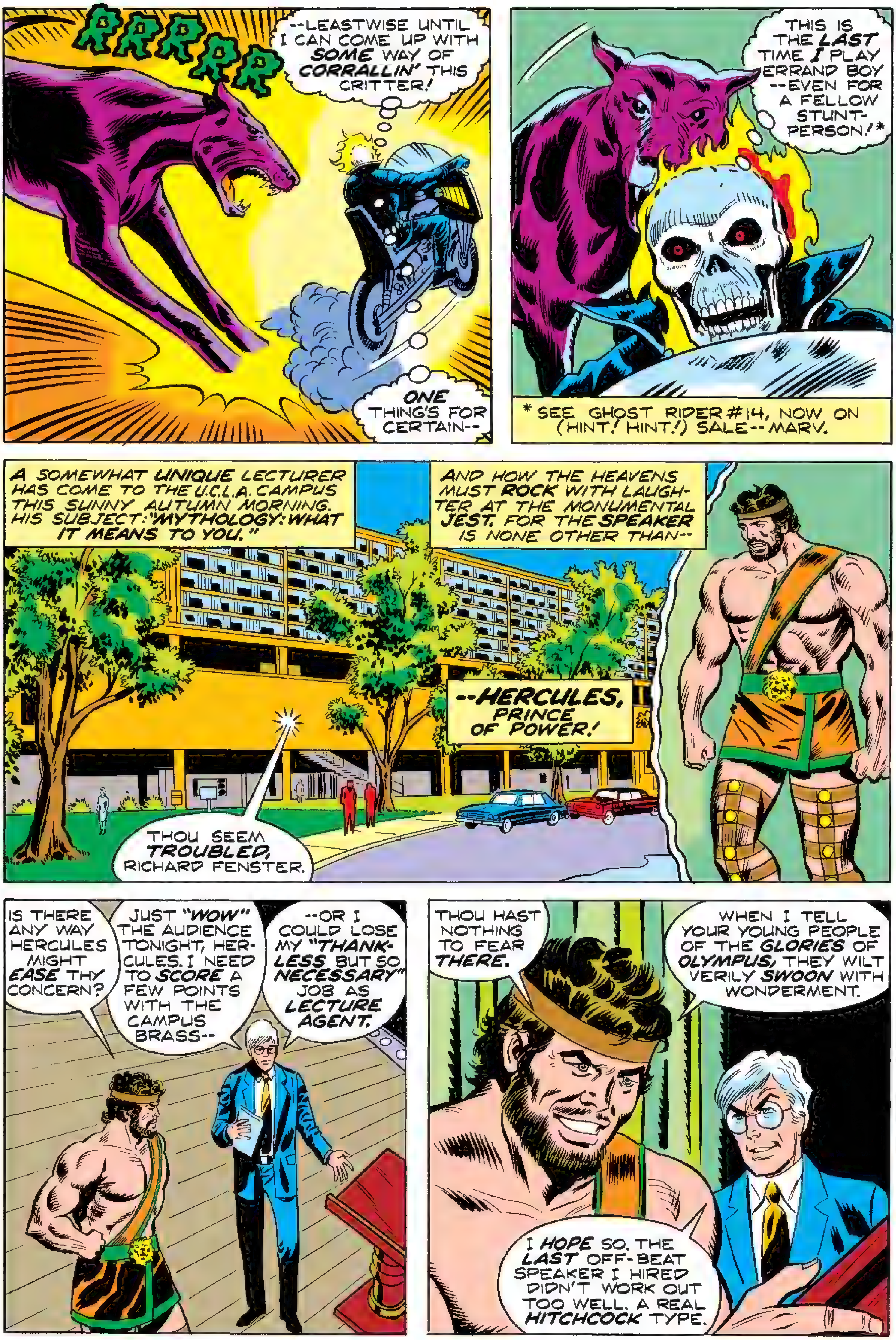

WHY, 'TASH? TO HELP YOU FORGET MATT?
THAT'S NOT IT, IVAN. I DON'T WANT TO FORGET MATT MURDOCK. WHAT WE HAD WAS GOOD--WHILE IT LASTED.
WE PUSHED OUR LUCK, THAT'S ALL. KEPT THE GAME GOING TOO LONG.
I WOULDN'T CALL IT A GAME, KID.
'CAUSE EVEN THIS OLD FOGEY CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE STILL IN LOVE WITH HORN-HEAD. MAYBE...
HUH?
WHERE'S THIS UNEARTHLY GLOW COMING FROM?
IVAN! THERE'S SOME KIND OF PORTAL APPEARING IN THIS VERY ROOM!
AND ARMORED WOMEN ARE CHARGING FORTH FROM IT.
WE HAVE COME FOR VENUS, WOMAN!
WE KNOW SHE IS NEAR. CONCEAL HER ONLY AT THE COST OF YOUR OWN MORTAL LIFE!
I DON'T LIKE THE WAY YOU'RE WAVIN' THAT PIG-STICKER AROUND, BEAUTIFUL!
SO HERE'S LOOKIN' AT YOU!
THOP!
'TASH! STRIP FOR ACTION!
I'LL HOLD THEM OFF UNTIL YOU--
URGH!
GOOD WORK, WARRIOR!

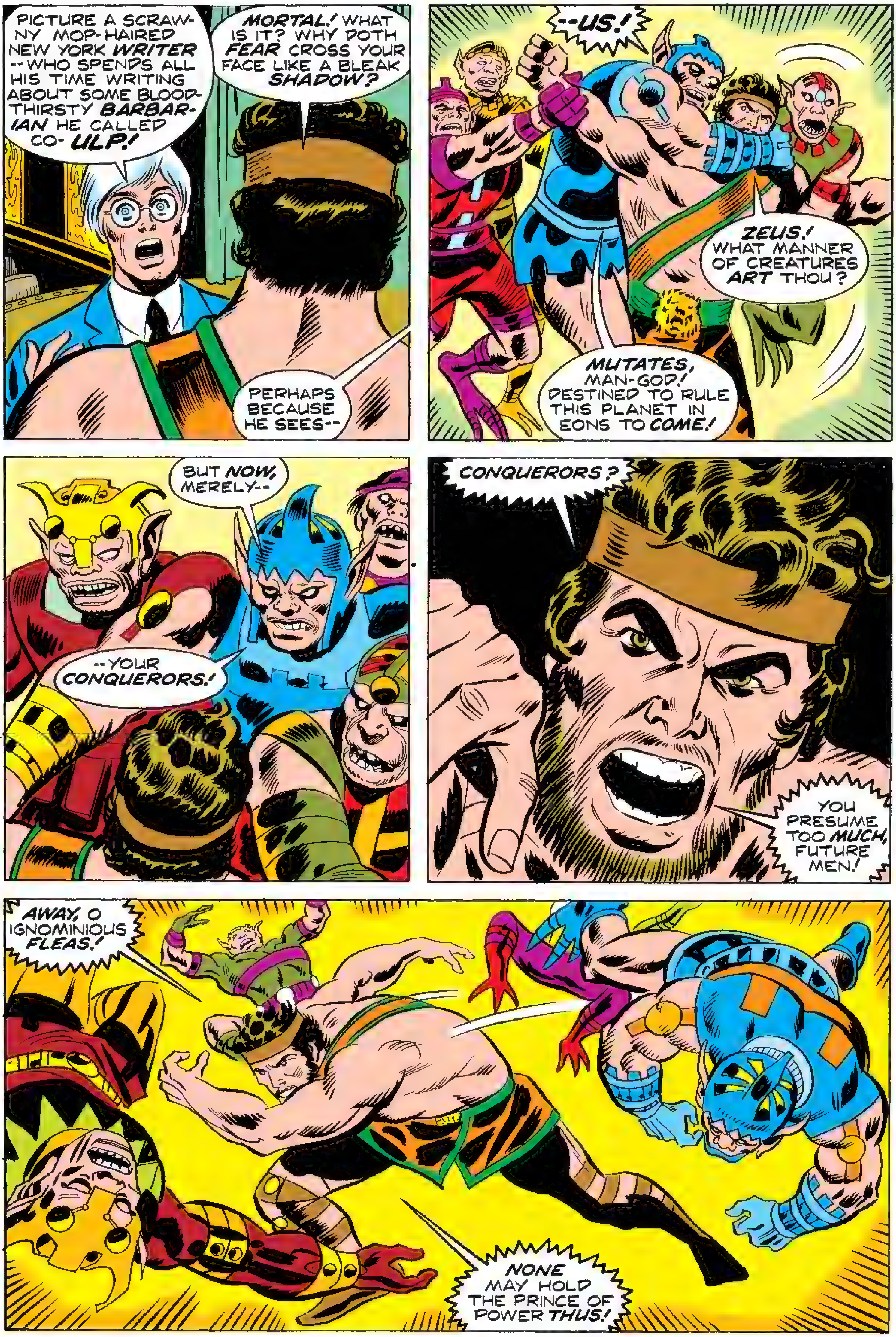

GENERAL! THE ONE WHO WAS WITH THIS MAN-CARRION IS POISED FOR COMBAT! SHALL WE DEAL WITH HER?
NO, WARRIOR. IF THE MORTAL SEEKS BATTLE, SHE SHALL FIND IT--
--ON THE TIP OF MY SWORD!
I GATHER YOU'RE USED TO TERRIFYING YOUR OPPONENTS WITH THAT OVERSIZED KNITTING NEEDLE.
WELL, HERE'S A FLASH FOR YOU:
THE WIDOW DOESN'T SCARE!
WELCOMING PROSPECTIVE RUSSIAN TEACHERS ISN'T REALLY A JOB FOR UCLA'S NEWEST HUMANITIES PROFESSOR--
--BUT I WANT TO MEET THE FAMOUS NATASHA ROMANOFF.
I SEEM TO HAVE ACQUIRED AN ALMOST HUMAN CURIOSITY IN MY MORTAL GUISE AS DR. VICTORIA STARR.
GENERAL! THE GODDESS IS HERE!
THIS CAN'T BE!
WHAT ARE HIPPOLYTA'S AMAZONS DOING HERE?
SEIZE HER!
UUNNNNNN!
ZAT!
APPARENTLY, OUR NEW ARRIVAL IS THE REASON FOR YOUR VISIT HERE, LADIES--
ZAT!
--AND, AS SUCH, SHE'S JUST GAINED THE PROTECTION OF THE BLACK WIDOW--
--AND MY WIDOW'S BITE!

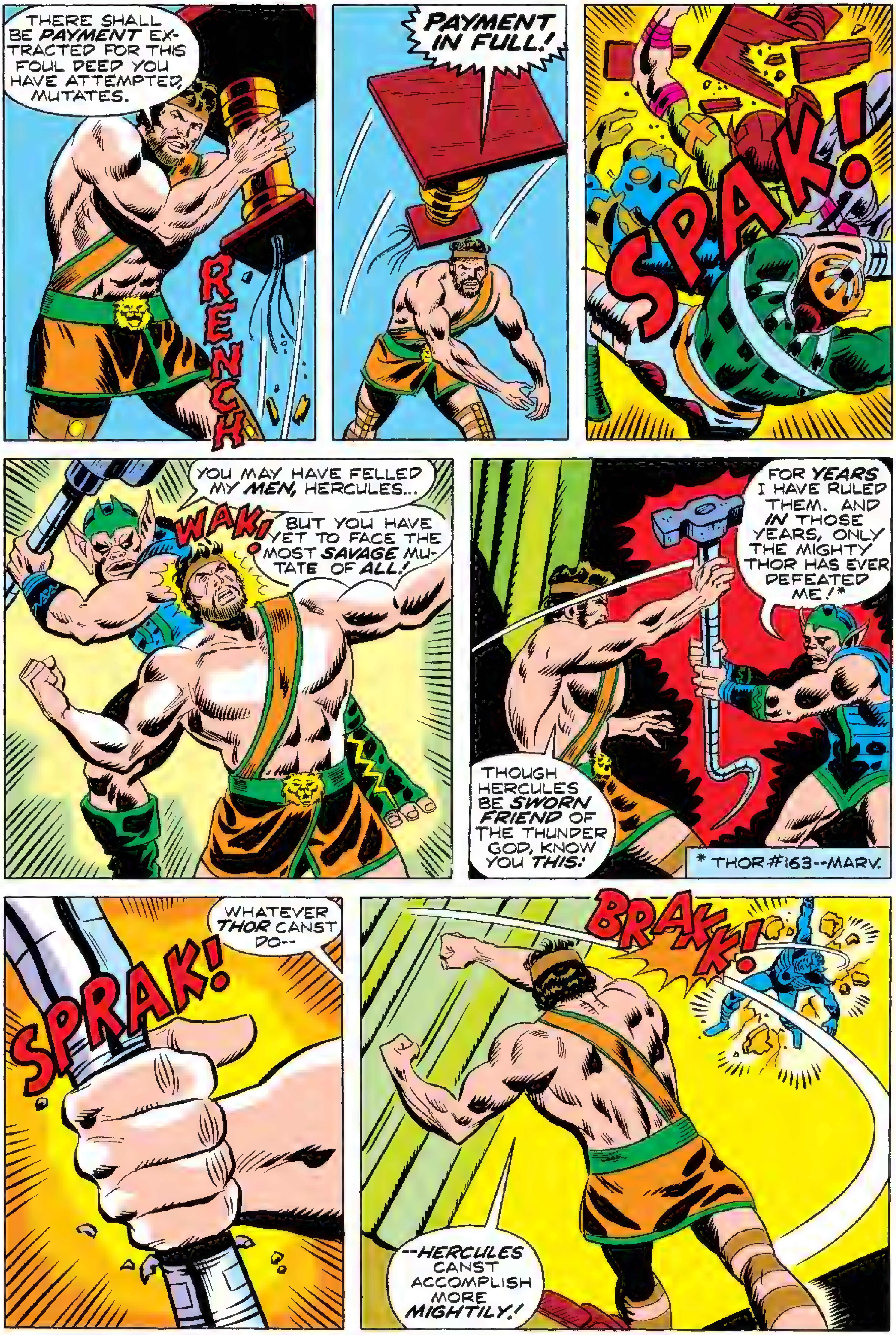

YOU CAN'T FIGHT THEM! THEY'RE THE MOST FIERCELY-TRAINED WARRIORS IN OLYM--THEIR WORLD!
I DOUBT MY K.G.B. TASKMASTERS WERE LESS DEMANDING IN PREPARING MY CURRICULUM. STILL...
ZAT!
IT MIGHT INDEED BEHOOVE US TO SEEK A--
CHUK
--STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL.
BUT WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE IVAN?
YOU NEEDN'T CONCERN YOURSELF ABOUT HIM, MS. ROMANOFF. THOUGH THE AMAZONS ARE INTERESTED SOLELY IN MY DEMISE--
--I HAVE NEVERTHELESS, ARRANGED HIS SAFETY.
HOW--
I THINK, MY FRIEND--
--YOU HAD BEST EXPLAIN JUST WHO YOU ARE AND WHY THESE WARRIOR-WOMEN PURSUE YOU.
I DON'T FACE DEATH WITHOUT GOOD REASON!
AN APPREHENSIVE CYCLIST TRAVERSES THE UCLA CAMPUS THIS SUNNY AUTUMN MORNING. IN THE PAST, HE WAS A PAWN... NO, A VICTIM ...OF SATAN. TODAY, HE IS A FREE MAN.
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
THESE KIDS LOOK TERRIFIED!
YET HIS FREEDOM HAS MADE HIS LIFE INCREASINGLY COMPLICATED AND HE WONDERS WHY THIS SHOULD BE SO.
TURN AROUND, PAL! THERE'S SOME KIND OF THING BACK THERE!
HE WILL FIND NO RELIEF FOR HIS PUZZLEMENT HERE...
...ONLY DANGER!
WHOA!
NOW THAT WAS JUST A MITE TOO CLOSE!

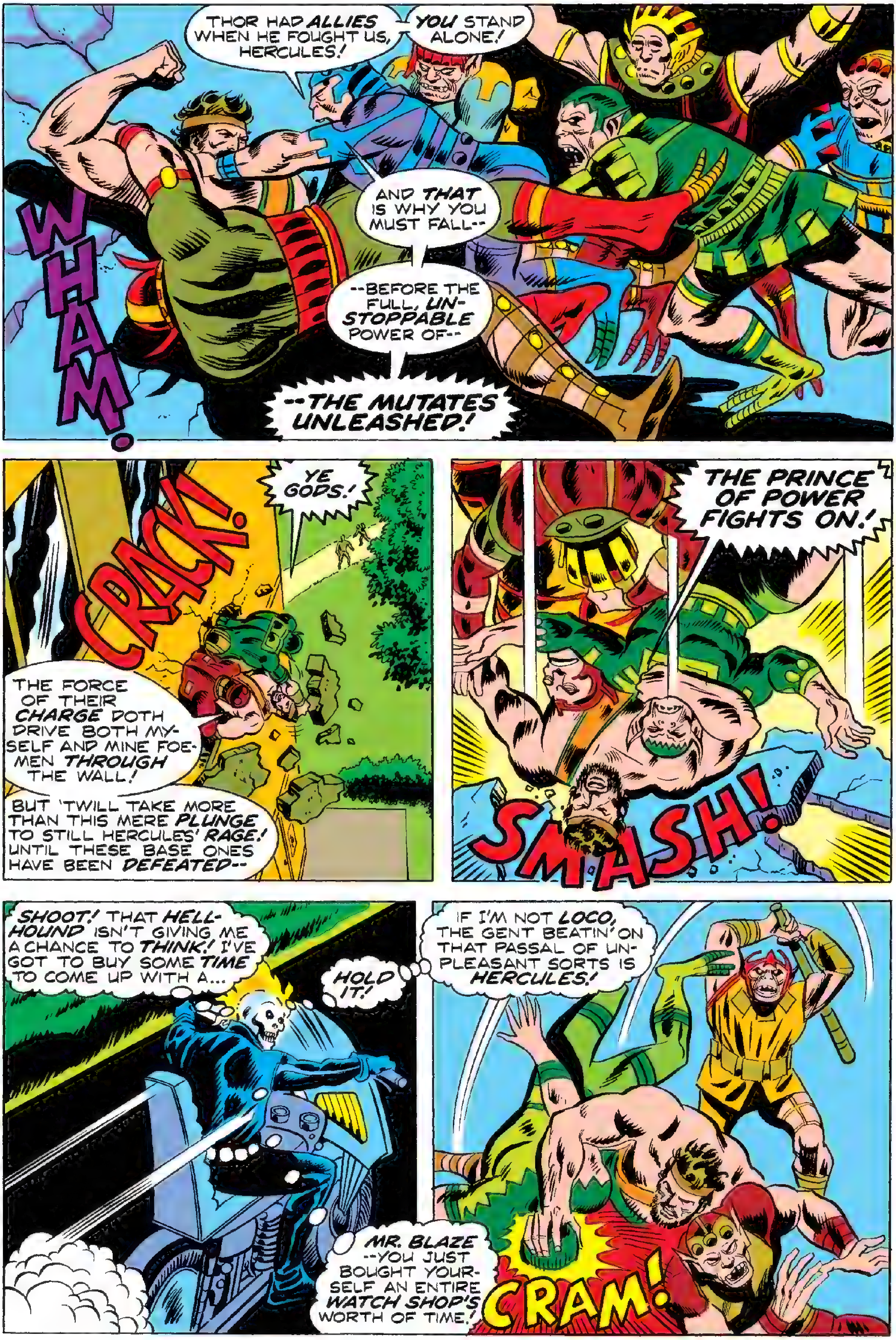

I GUESS THERE MUST BE A *FRACUS* IN THE WIND. I'M STARTING TO *CHANGE*--
--JUST LIKE I DID WHEN THE *TRAPSTER* ATTACKED!*
*GHOST RIDER #13--MARV.
TOO BAD FOR WHOEVER *THREW* THAT THING.
'CAUSE NOW, ON TOP OF FIGHTIN' *JOHNNY* "THE WORLD'S GREATEST STUNT-RIDER" *BLAZE*--
--*HE'S GOT TO DEAL WITH*--
--*THE GHOST RIDER!*
THEN AGAIN...
STAND FAST, BE YE MORTAL OR *DEMON!* BY COMMAND OF MY MASTER, NO ONE MUST PASS *CERBERUS,* GUARDIAN OF THE DEPTHS!
FOR MY MASTER WILL BROOK *NO* INTERFERENCE WITH HIS PLAN TO *CRUSH* THE MAN-GOD!
YOUR *"MASTER"* APPEARS TO BE A MEMBER OF THE SAME CLUB AS AN OLD *ACQUAINTANCE* OF MINE, FELLA.
AND *THAT* BEING THE CASE--

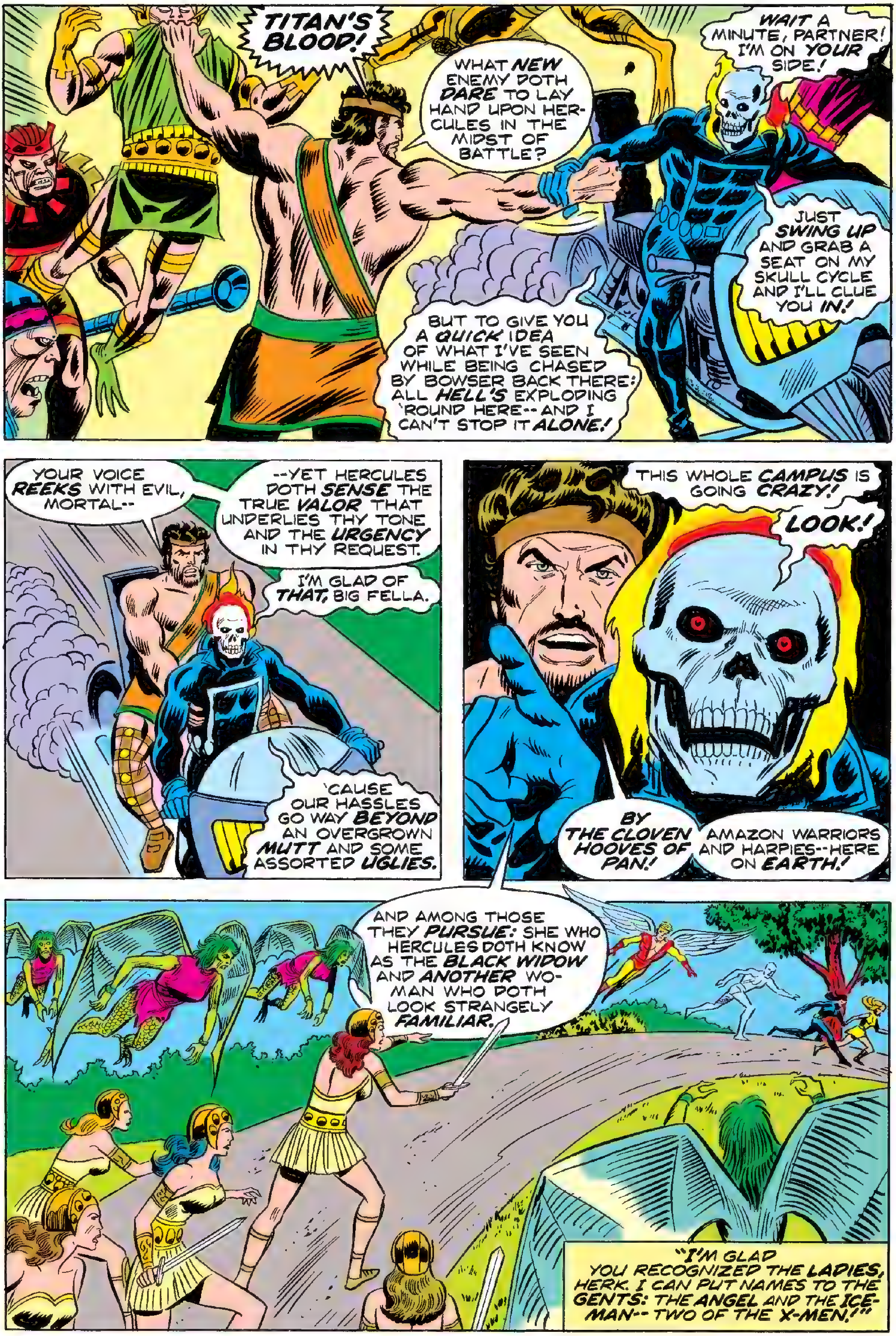

HE CAN TAKE HIS PLAN AND STUFF IT!
FWOOSH!
YRRGH!
THE MAN-DEMON STRIKES WITH A FLAME THAT BURNS EVEN ONE SUCH AS I!*
*HELLFIRE, BY TRADE-NAME--MARV.
BUT CERBERUS WAS CREATED TO BE MANY GUARDIANS.
AND WHAT ONE IS ILL-EQUIPPED TO BATTLE--
--ANOTHER CAN DESTROY!
OHHH, BOY. NOW I GET IT!
CERBERUS: THE GUARDIAN OF HADES IN ROMAN MYTHOLOGY.
A.K.A. BOWSER HERE.
RRRRRR
AND JUDGING FROM THE WAY HE'S FLASHIN' HIS PEARLY WHITES AT ME--
--HIS BARK ISN'T EVEN IN THE SAME BALLPARK AS HIS BITE!
I THINK I'D BETTER VAMOOSE--
VROOOOMMMM

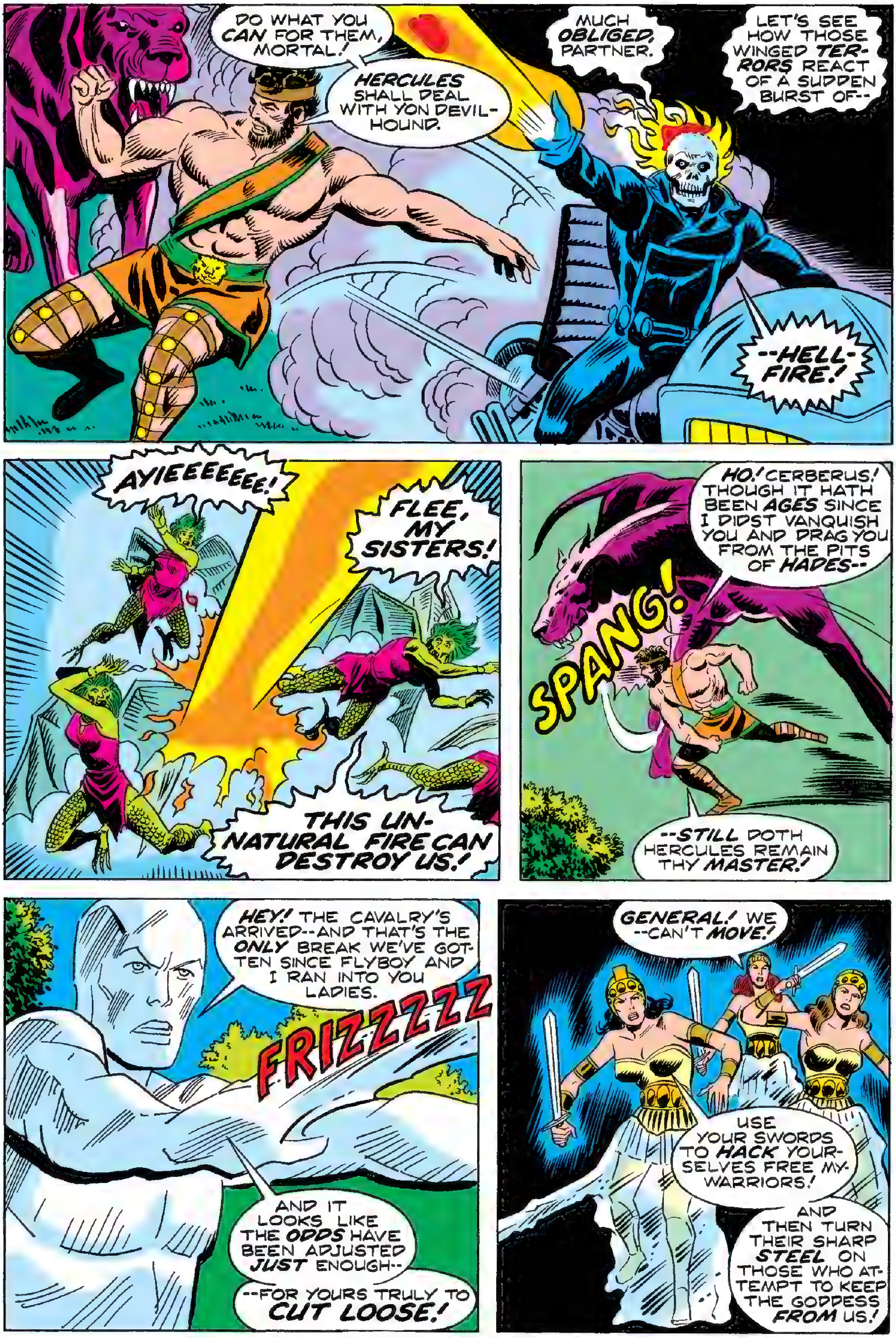

RRRRR
--LEASTWISE UNTIL I CAN COME UP WITH SOME WAY OF CORRALLIN' THIS CRITTER!
ONE THING'S FOR CERTAIN--
THIS IS THE LAST TIME I PLAY ERRAND BOY --EVEN FOR A FELLOW STUNT-PERSON!*
* SEE GHOST RIDER #14, NOW ON (HINT! HINT!) SALE--MARV.
A SOMEWHAT UNIQUE LECTURER HAS COME TO THE U.C.L.A. CAMPUS THIS SUNNY AUTUMN MORNING. HIS SUBJECT: "MYTHOLOGY: WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU."
AND HOW THE HEAVENS MUST ROCK WITH LAUGHTER AT THE MONUMENTAL JEST. FOR THE SPEAKER IS NONE OTHER THAN--
--HERCULES, PRINCE OF POWER!
THOU SEEM TROUBLED, RICHARD FENSTER.
IS THERE ANY WAY HERCULES MIGHT EASE THY CONCERN?
JUST "WOW" THE AUDIENCE TONIGHT, HERCULES. I NEED TO SCORE A FEW POINTS WITH THE CAMPUS BRASS--
--OR I COULD LOSE MY "THANKLESS BUT SO NECESSARY" JOB AS LECTURE AGENT.
THOU HAST NOTHING TO FEAR THERE.
WHEN I TELL YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE GLORIES OF OLYMPUS, THEY WILT VERILY SWOON WITH WONDERMENT.
I HOPE SO. THE LAST OFF-BEAT SPEAKER I HIRED DIDN'T WORK OUT TOO WELL. A REAL HITCHCOCK TYPE.

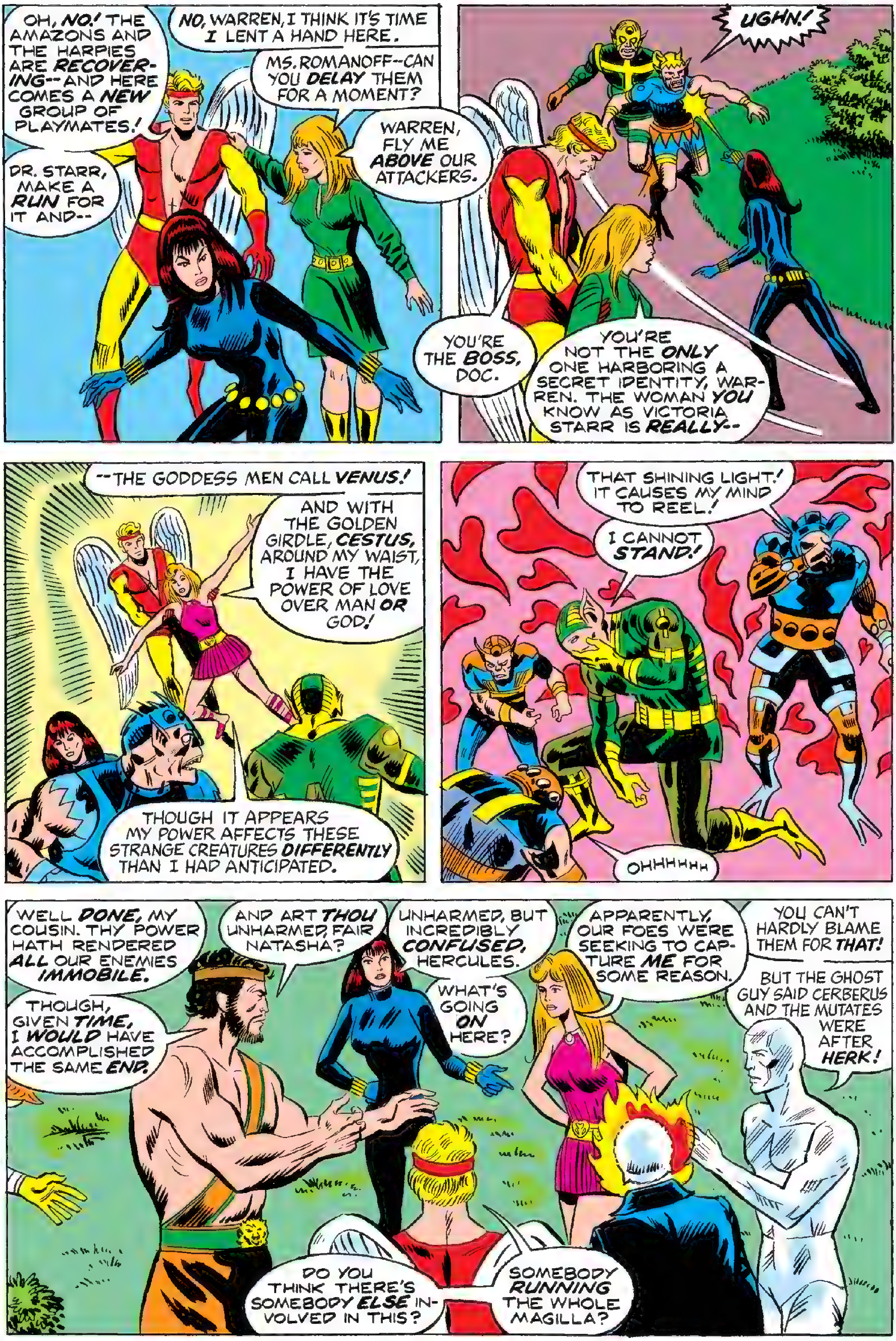

PICTURE A SCRAWNY MOP-HAIRED NEW YORK *WRITER* --WHO SPENDS ALL HIS TIME WRITING ABOUT SOME BLOODTHIRSTY *BARBARIAN* HE CALLED CO- *ULP!*
MORTAL! WHAT IS IT? WHY DOTH *FEAR* CROSS YOUR FACE LIKE A BLEAK *SHADOW?*
PERHAPS BECAUSE HE SEES--
--US!
ZEUS! WHAT MANNER OF CREATURES *ART* THOU?
MUTATES, MAN-GOD! DESTINED TO RULE THIS PLANET IN EONS TO *COME!*
BUT *NOW,* MERELY--
--YOUR *CONQUERORS!*
CONQUERORS?
YOU PRESUME TOO *MUCH,* FUTURE MEN!
AWAY, O IGNOMINIOUS *FLEAS!*
NONE MAY HOLD THE PRINCE OF POWER *THUS!*


THERE SHALL BE PAYMENT EXTRACTED FOR THIS FOUL DEED YOU HAVE ATTEMPTED, MUTATES.
RENCH
PAYMENT IN FULL!
SPAK!
YOU MAY HAVE FELLED MY MEN, HERCULES...
WAK!
BUT YOU HAVE YET TO FACE THE MOST SAVAGE MUTATE OF ALL!
FOR YEARS I HAVE RULED THEM. AND IN THOSE YEARS, ONLY THE MIGHTY THOR HAS EVER DEFEATED ME!*
THOUGH HERCULES BE SWORN FRIEND OF THE THUNDER GOD, KNOW YOU THIS:
* THOR #163--MARV.
WHATEVER THOR CANST DO--
SPRAK!
BRAKK!
--HERCULES CANST ACCOMPLISH MORE MIGHTILY!

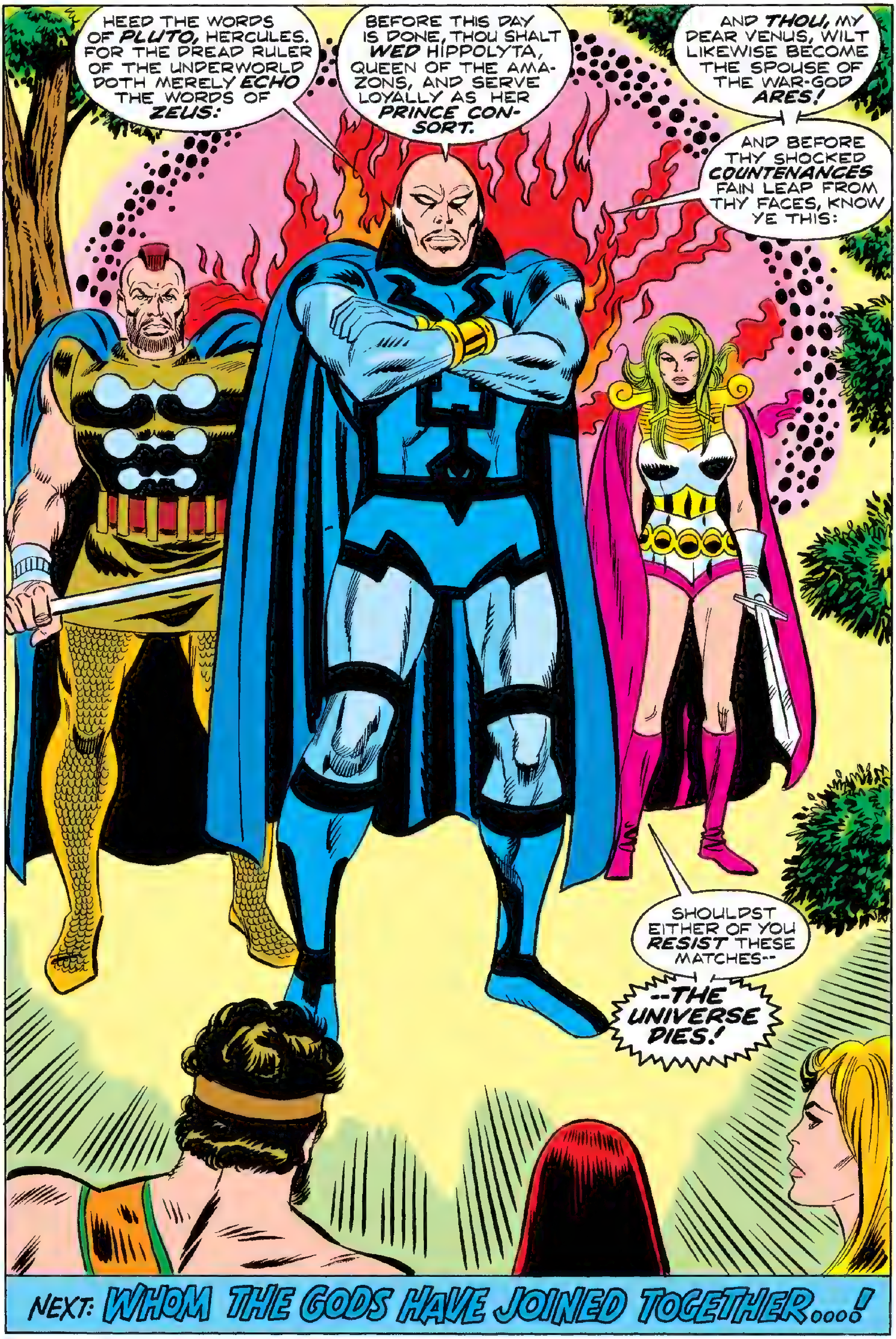

THOR HAD **ALLIES** WHEN HE FOUGHT US, HERCULES!
YOU STAND ALONE!
AND **THAT** IS WHY YOU MUST FALL--
--BEFORE THE FULL, **UNSTOPPABLE** POWER OF--
--THE MUTATES UNLEASHED!
WHAM!
CRACK!
YE GODS!
THE FORCE OF THEIR **CHARGE** DOTH DRIVE BOTH MYSELF AND MINE FOEMEN **THROUGH** THE WALL!
BUT 'TWILL TAKE MORE THAN THIS MERE **PLUNGE** TO STILL HERCULES' **RAGE!** UNTIL THESE BASE ONES HAVE BEEN **DEFEATED**--
THE PRINCE OF POWER FIGHTS ON!
SMASH!
SHOOT! THAT **HELL-HOUND** ISN'T GIVING ME A CHANCE TO **THINK!** I'VE GOT TO BUY SOME **TIME** TO COME UP WITH A...
HOLD IT!
IF I'M NOT **LOCO,** THE GENT BEATIN' ON THAT PASSAL OF UNPLEASANT SORTS IS **HERCULES!**
MR. BLAZE --YOU JUST BOUGHT YOURSELF AN ENTIRE **WATCH SHOP'S** WORTH OF TIME!
CRAM!


TITAN'S BLOOD!
WHAT NEW ENEMY DOTH DARE TO LAY HAND UPON HERCULES IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE?
WAIT A MINUTE, PARTNER! I'M ON YOUR SIDE!
JUST SWING UP AND GRAB A SEAT ON MY SKULL CYCLE AND I'LL CLUE YOU IN!
BUT TO GIVE YOU A QUICK IDEA OF WHAT I'VE SEEN WHILE BEING CHASED BY BOWSER BACK THERE: ALL HELL'S EXPLODING 'ROUND HERE-- AND I CAN'T STOP IT ALONE!
YOUR VOICE REEKS WITH EVIL, MORTAL--
--YET HERCULES DOTH SENSE THE TRUE VALOR THAT UNDERLIES THY TONE AND THE URGENCY IN THY REQUEST.
I'M GLAD OF THAT, BIG FELLA.
'CAUSE OUR HASSLES GO WAY BEYOND AN OVERGROWN MUTT AND SOME ASSORTED UGLIES.
THIS WHOLE CAMPUS IS GOING CRAZY!
LOOK!
BY THE CLOVEN HOOVES OF PAN!
AMAZON WARRIORS AND HARPIES--HERE ON EARTH!
AND AMONG THOSE THEY PURSUE: SHE WHO HERCULES DOTH KNOW AS THE BLACK WIDOW AND ANOTHER WOMAN WHO DOTH LOOK STRANGELY FAMILIAR.
"I'M GLAD YOU RECOGNIZED THE LADIES, HERK. I CAN PUT NAMES TO THE GENTS: THE ANGEL AND THE ICEMAN-- TWO OF THE X-MEN!"


DO WHAT YOU **CAN** FOR THEM, MORTAL!
HERCULES SHALL DEAL WITH YON DEVIL-HOUND.
MUCH **OBLIGED,** PARTNER.
LET'S SEE HOW THOSE WINGED **TERRORS** REACT OF A SUDDEN BURST OF--
--**HELL-FIRE!**
AYIEEEEEEEE!
FLEE, MY SISTERS!
THIS UNNATURAL FIRE CAN DESTROY US!
HO! CERBERUS! THOUGH IT HATH BEEN **AGES** SINCE I DIDST VANQUISH YOU AND DRAG YOU FROM THE PITS OF **HADES**--
SPANG!
--**STILL** DOTH HERCULES REMAIN THY **MASTER!**
HEY! THE CAVALRY'S ARRIVED--AND THAT'S THE **ONLY** BREAK WE'VE GOTTEN SINCE FLYBOY AND I RAN INTO YOU LADIES.
FRIZZZZZ
AND IT LOOKS LIKE THE **ODDS** HAVE BEEN ADJUSTED **JUST** ENOUGH--
--FOR YOURS TRULY TO **CUT LOOSE!**
GENERAL! WE --CAN'T **MOVE!**
USE YOUR SWORDS TO **HACK** YOURSELVES FREE MY WARRIORS!
AND THEN TURN THEIR SHARP **STEEL** ON THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE GODDESS **FROM** US!


OH, NO! THE AMAZONS AND THE HARPIES ARE RECOVERING--AND HERE COMES A NEW GROUP OF PLAYMATES!
NO, WARREN, I THINK IT'S TIME I LENT A HAND HERE.
MS. ROMANOFF--CAN YOU DELAY THEM FOR A MOMENT?
DR. STARR, MAKE A RUN FOR IT AND--
WARREN, FLY ME ABOVE OUR ATTACKERS.
UGHN!
YOU'RE THE BOSS, DOC.
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE HARBORING A SECRET IDENTITY, WARREN. THE WOMAN YOU KNOW AS VICTORIA STARR IS REALLY--
--THE GODDESS MEN CALL VENUS!
AND WITH THE GOLDEN GIRDLE, CESTUS, AROUND MY WAIST, I HAVE THE POWER OF LOVE OVER MAN OR GOD!
THOUGH IT APPEARS MY POWER AFFECTS THESE STRANGE CREATURES DIFFERENTLY THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED.
THAT SHINING LIGHT! IT CAUSES MY MIND TO REEL!
I CANNOT STAND!
OHHHHHH
WELL DONE, MY COUSIN. THY POWER HATH RENDERED ALL OUR ENEMIES IMMOBILE.
THOUGH, GIVEN TIME, I WOULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE SAME END.
AND ART THOU UNHARMED, FAIR NATASHA?
UNHARMED, BUT INCREDIBLY CONFUSED, HERCULES.
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
APPARENTLY, OUR FOES WERE SEEKING TO CAPTURE ME FOR SOME REASON.
YOU CAN'T HARDLY BLAME THEM FOR THAT!
BUT THE GHOST GUY SAID CERBERUS AND THE MUTATES WERE AFTER HERK!
DO YOU THINK THERE'S SOMEBODY ELSE INVOLVED IN THIS?
SOMEBODY RUNNING THE WHOLE MAGILLA?

ZAT!
THOU ART INDEED A BASE *FOOL*, WINGED ONE. OF *COURSE*, THERE BE SOMEONE BEHIND THE WEAVING OF THIS DAY'S *EVENTS!* SOMEONE WITH POWER ENOW TO SMITE YOU *ALL* WITH BUT A *SINGLE* BLAST!
UHN!
YRRGH!
THAT BLAST WAS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DROP *ALL* OF US! I FEEL LIKE ALL MY STRENGTH HAS BEEN *DRAINED* OUT OF ME!
YOU'RE NOT *KIDDIN'* LADY! I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN RUN OVER BY A *MACK TRUCK!*
LOOK! THERE'S ANOTHER OF THOSE *"HOLES"* APPEARING --JUST LIKE THE ONE THE *AMAZONS* CHARGED OUT OF! AND *INSIDE...*
IT CAN'T BE!
AND WHY *NOT*, VENUS? ART NOT *THOU*, A GODDESS OF OLYMPUS, HERE ON *EARTH?* WOULDST THOU *DENY* THE SAME TO THY *FELLOW...*
VILLAINS! THOU HAST PERPETRATED THY *FINAL* SCHEME UPON THE PRINCE OF POWER! THOU WILT BE...
SILENCE, THOU PRATTLING MAN-GOD! FOR, THIS DAY, I BRING THEE A DECREE FROM THY OWN *FATHER*, OUR LORD *ZEUS!*


HEED THE WORDS OF PLUTO, HERCULES. FOR THE DREAD RULER OF THE UNDERWORLD DOTH MERELY ECHO THE WORDS OF ZEUS:
BEFORE THIS DAY IS DONE, THOU SHALT WED HIPPOLYTA, QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS, AND SERVE LOYALLY AS HER PRINCE CONSORT.
AND THOU, MY DEAR VENUS, WILT LIKEWISE BECOME THE SPOUSE OF THE WAR-GOD ARES!
AND BEFORE THY SHOCKED COUNTENANCES FAIN LEAP FROM THY FACES, KNOW YE THIS:
SHOULDST EITHER OF YOU RESIST THESE MATCHES--
--THE UNIVERSE DIES!
NEXT: WHOM THE GODS HAVE JOINED TOGETHER...!

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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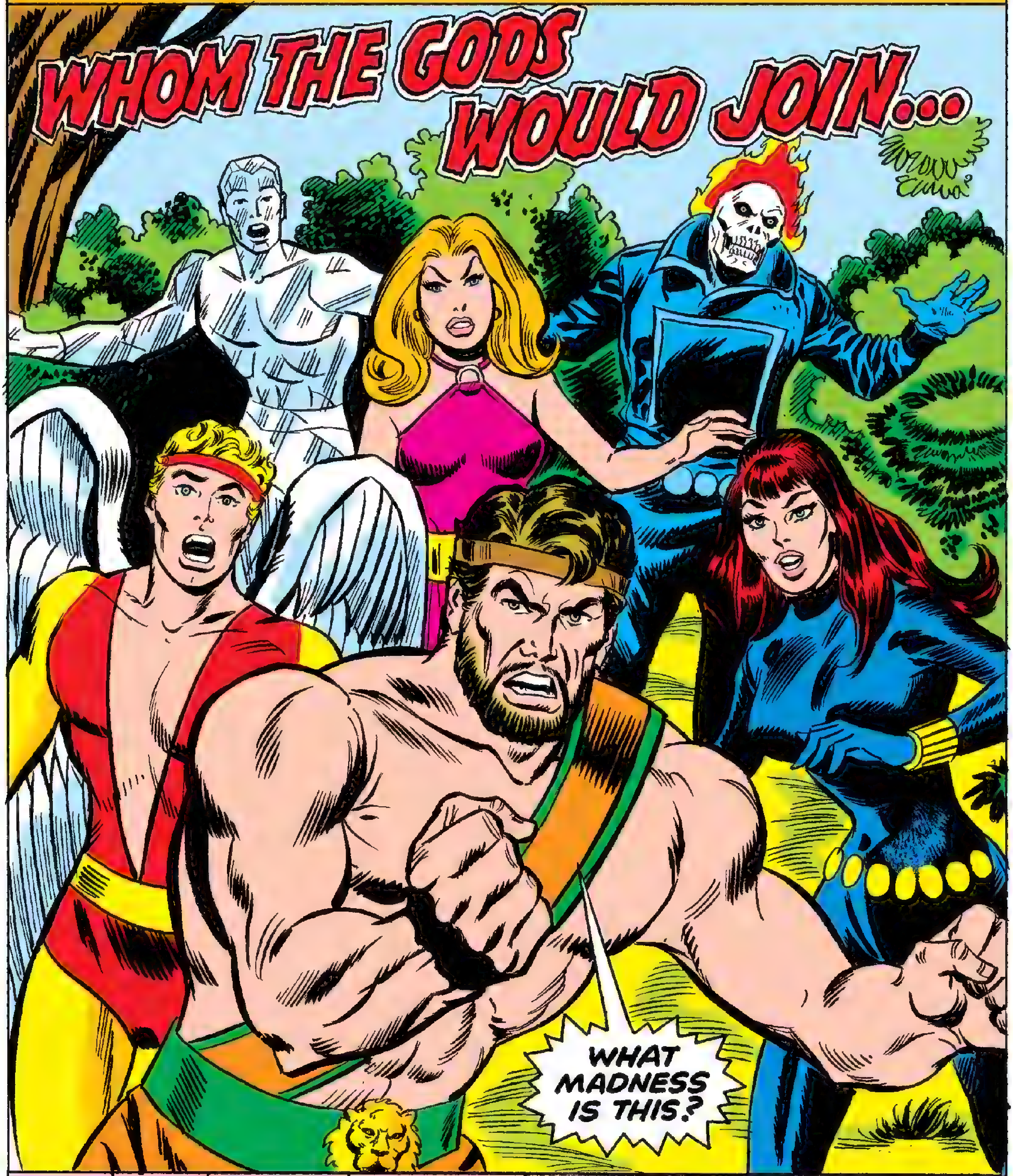
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
TM
YOUR COMRADES CANNOT HELP YOU, HERCULES!
TODAY BELONGS TO PLUTO, GOD of HELL!

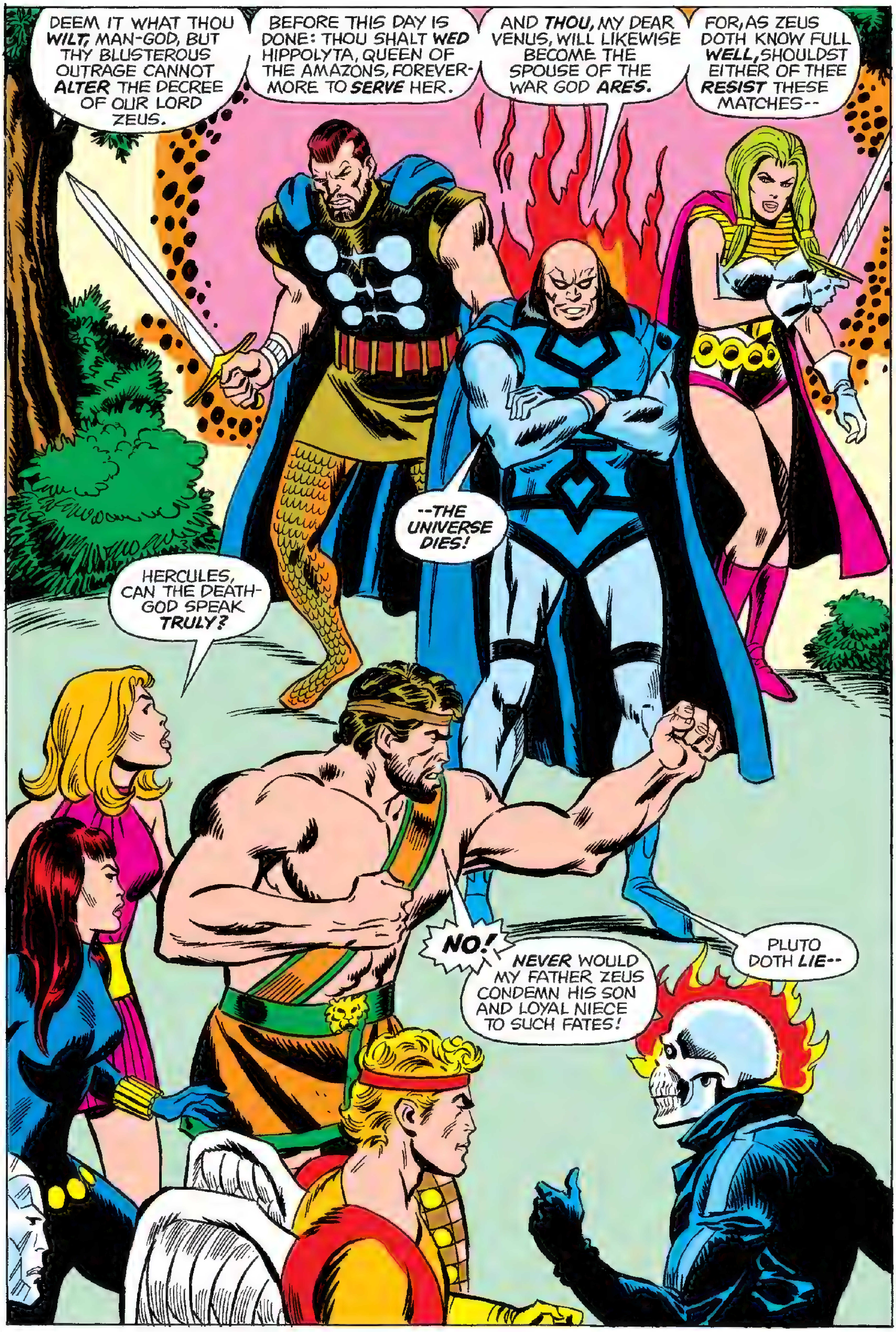
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

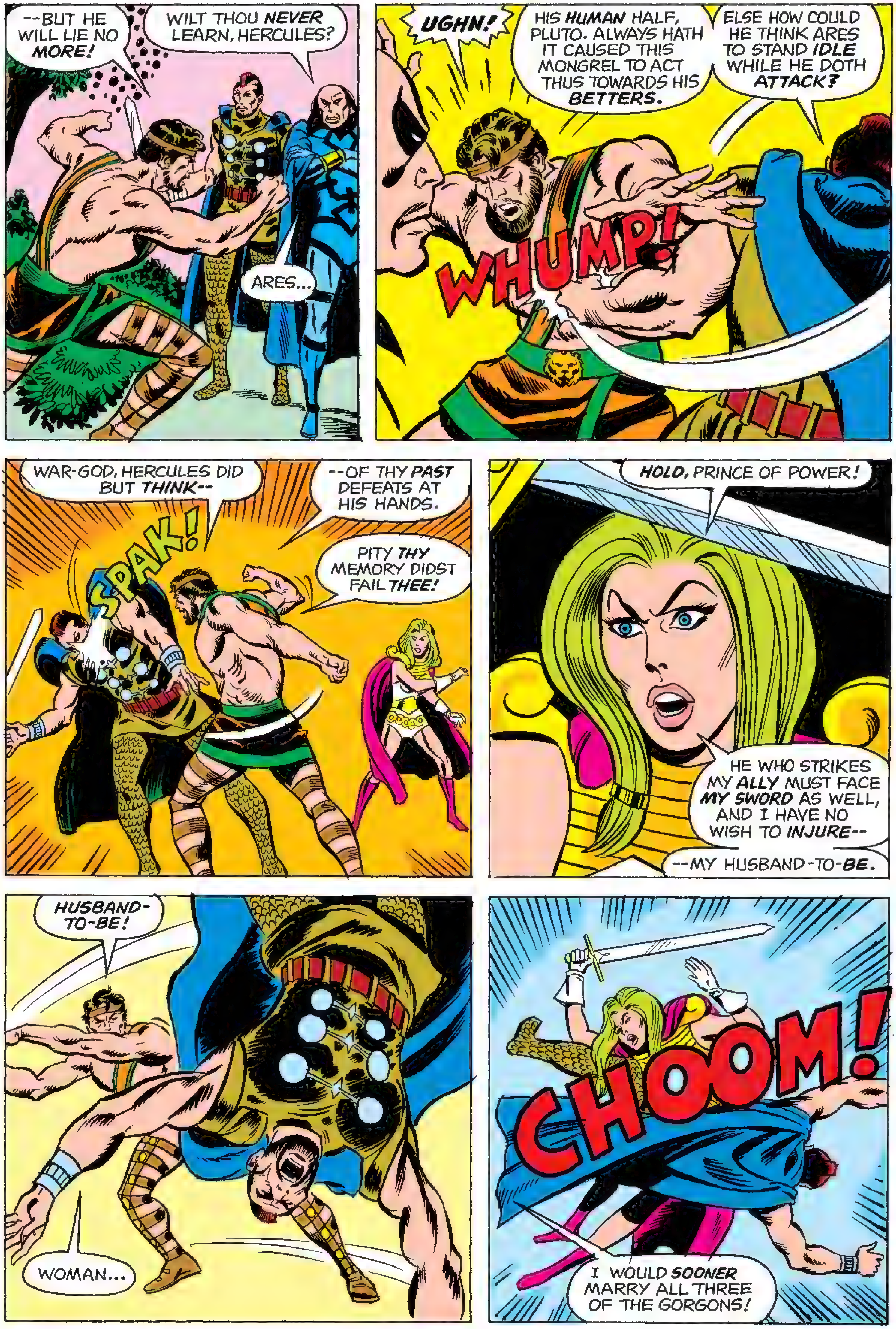
THE CHAMPIONS™

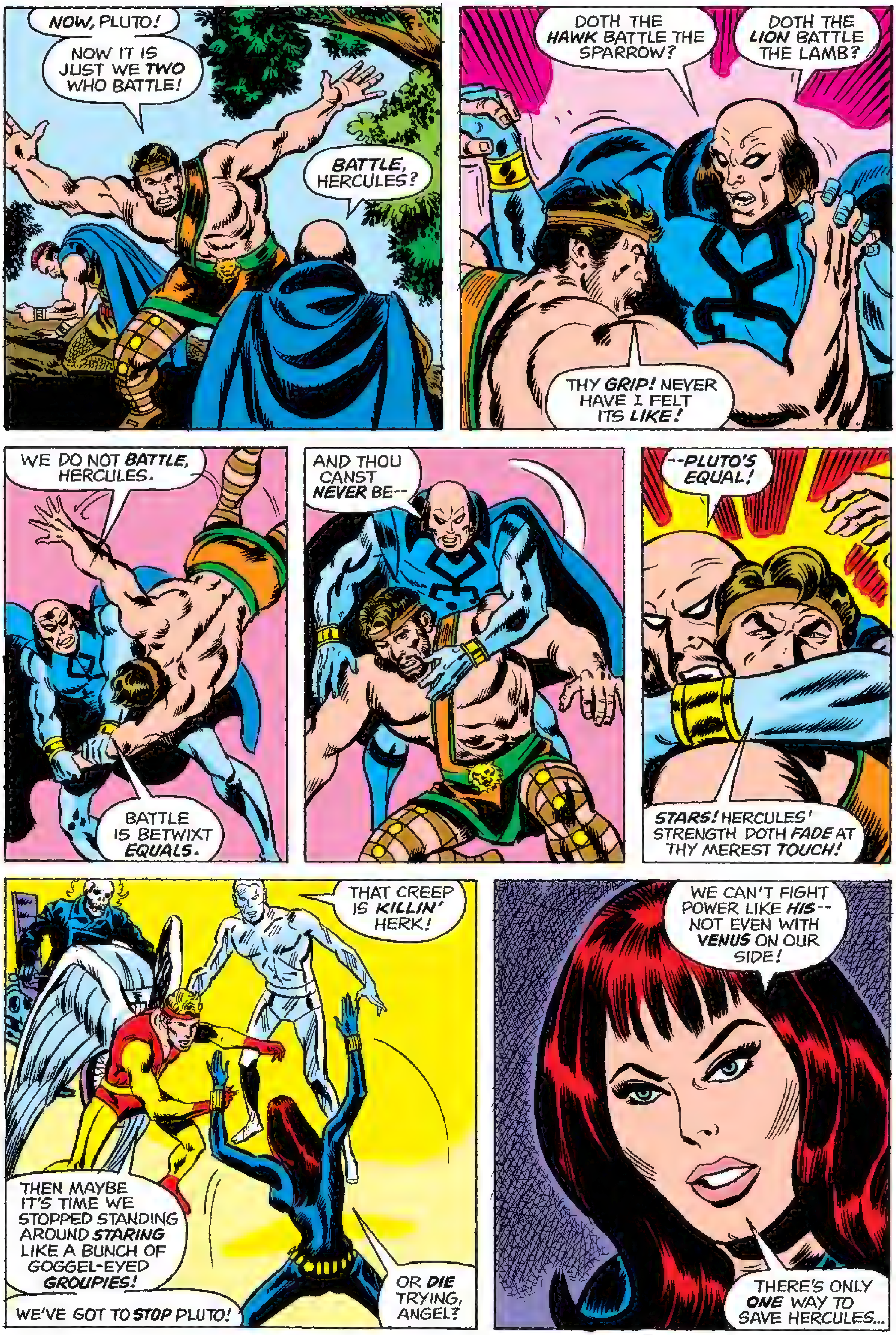
CHAOS REIGNS ON THE CAMPUS OF U.C.L.A. FOR IN THE PAST HOUR, ITS SCHOLARLY CONFINES HAVE BEEN **RENT** BY CREATURES FROM BEYOND **TIME**. HERCULES AND HIS NEW-FOUND COMRADES--THE ANGEL, THE BLACK WIDOW, THE GHOST RIDER, THE ICEMAN, AND VENUS--HAVE VALIANTLY **DEFEATED** THESE CREATURES...ONLY TO LEARN THAT THE PERIL HAS BARELY **BEGUN!**

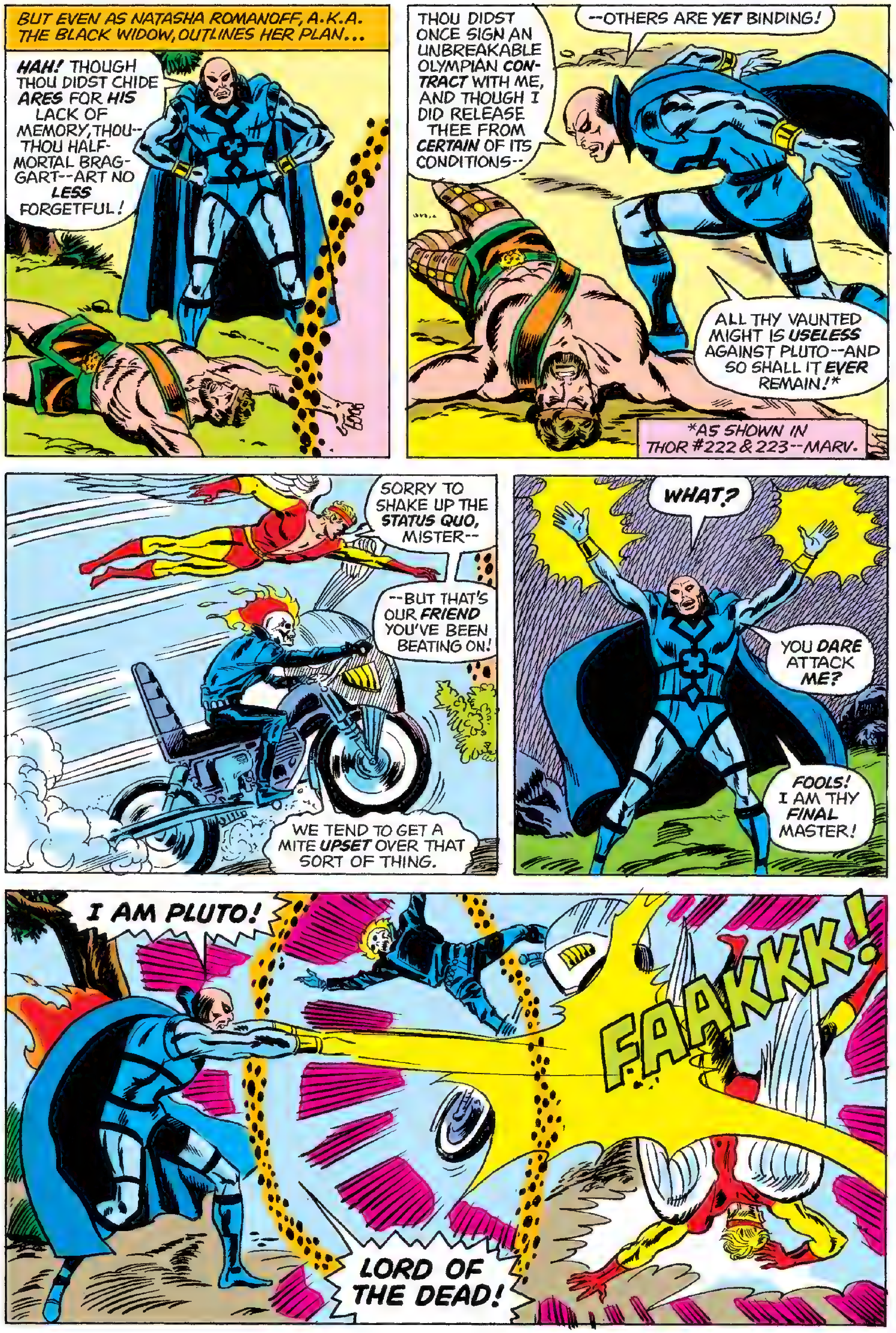

WHOM THE GODS WOULD JOIN...
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?

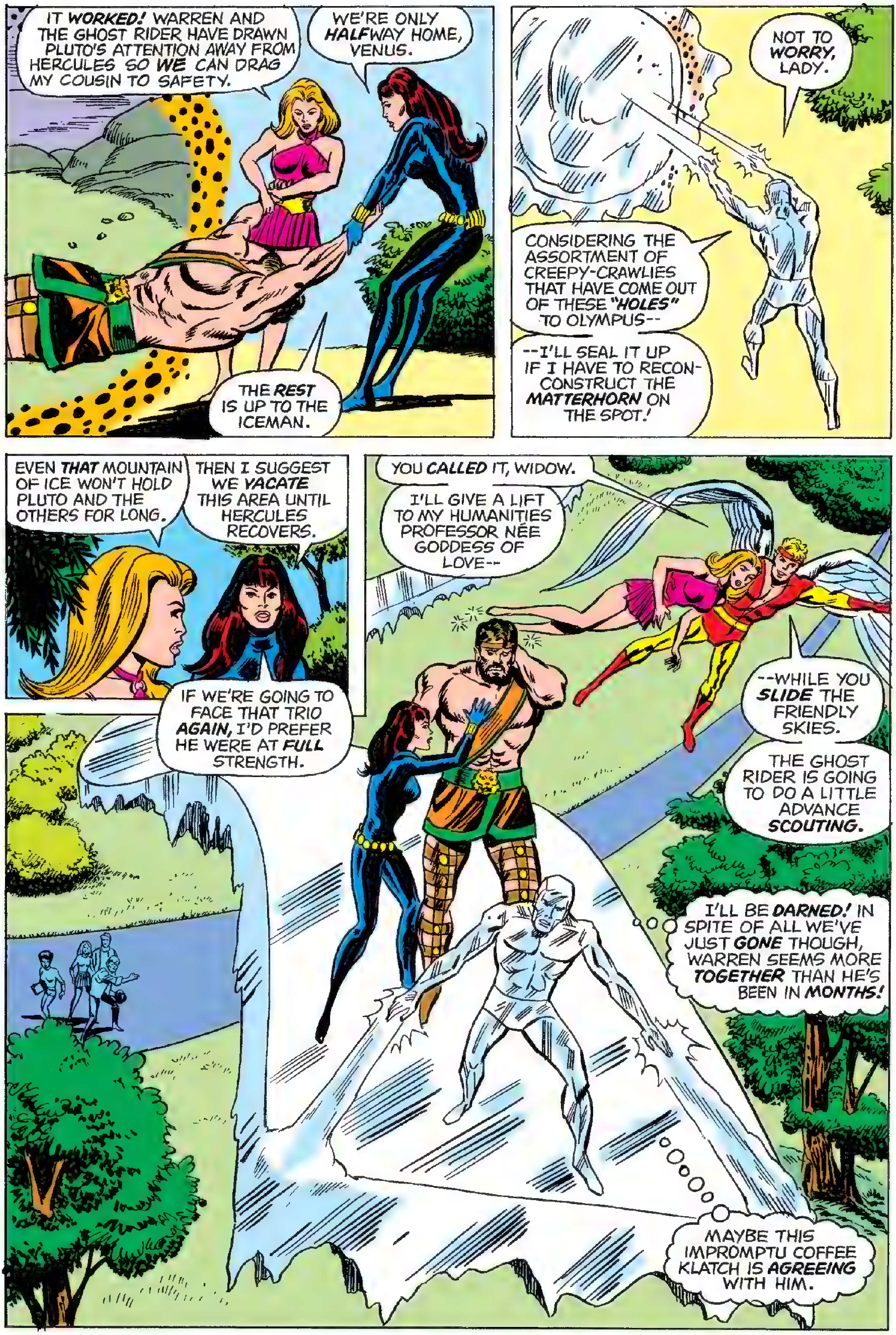
TONY ISABELLA WRITER / DON HECK ARTIST / JOHN TARTAG INKER / PHIL RACHE, Colorist IRV WATANABE, Letterer / MARV WOLFMAN EDITOR

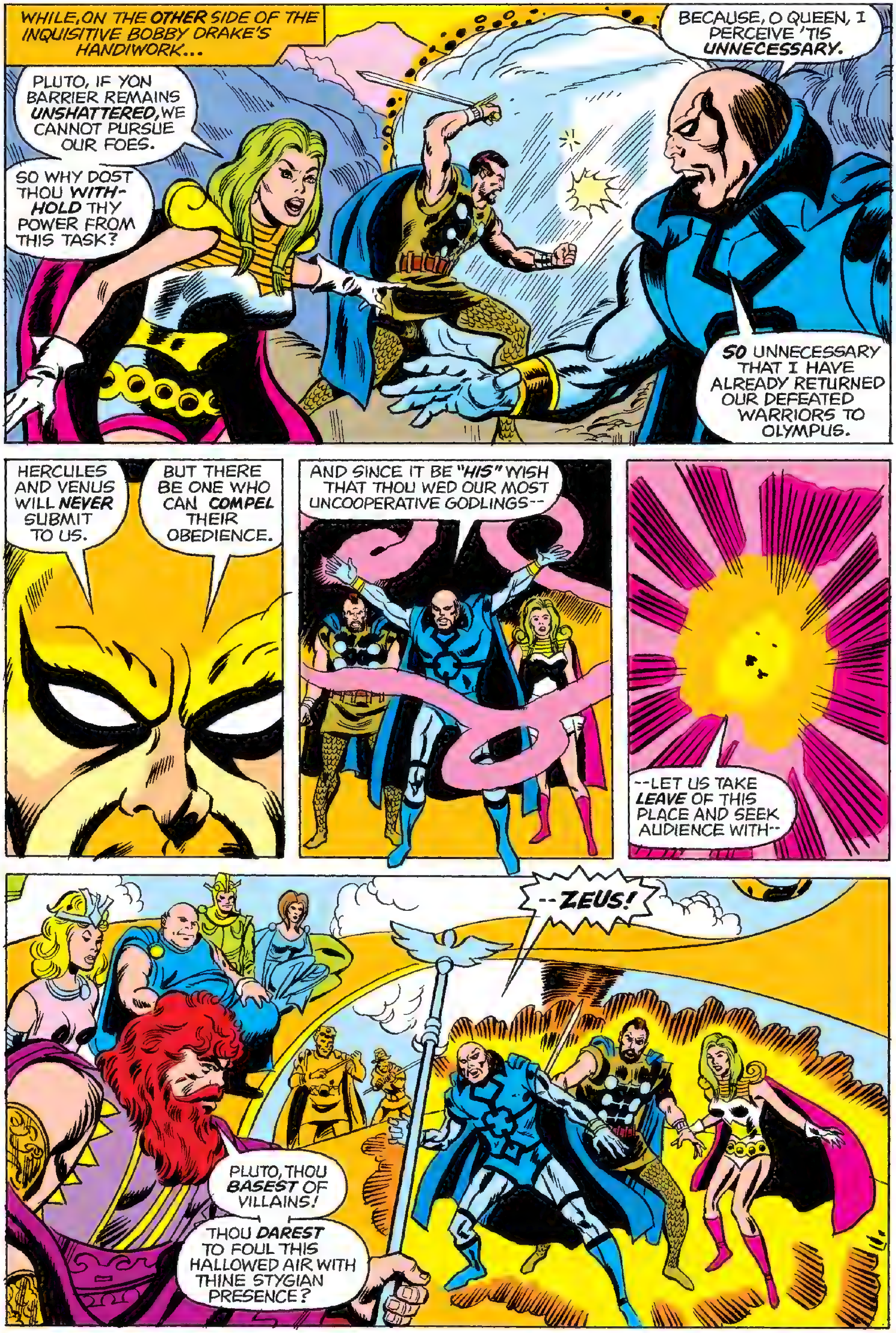

DEEM IT WHAT THOU *WILT,* MAN-GOD, BUT THY BLUSTEROUS OUTRAGE CANNOT *ALTER* THE DECREE OF OUR LORD ZEUS.
BEFORE THIS DAY IS DONE: THOU SHALT *WED* HIPPOLYTA, QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS, FOREVERMORE TO *SERVE* HER.
AND *THOU,* MY DEAR VENUS, WILL LIKEWISE BECOME THE SPOUSE OF THE WAR GOD *ARES.*
FOR, AS ZEUS DOTH KNOW FULL *WELL,* SHOULDST EITHER OF THEE *RESIST* THESE MATCHES--
--THE *UNIVERSE DIES!*
HERCULES, CAN THE DEATH-GOD SPEAK *TRULY?*
NO! *NEVER* WOULD MY FATHER ZEUS CONDEMN HIS SON AND LOYAL NIECE TO SUCH FATES!
PLUTO DOTH *LIE*--

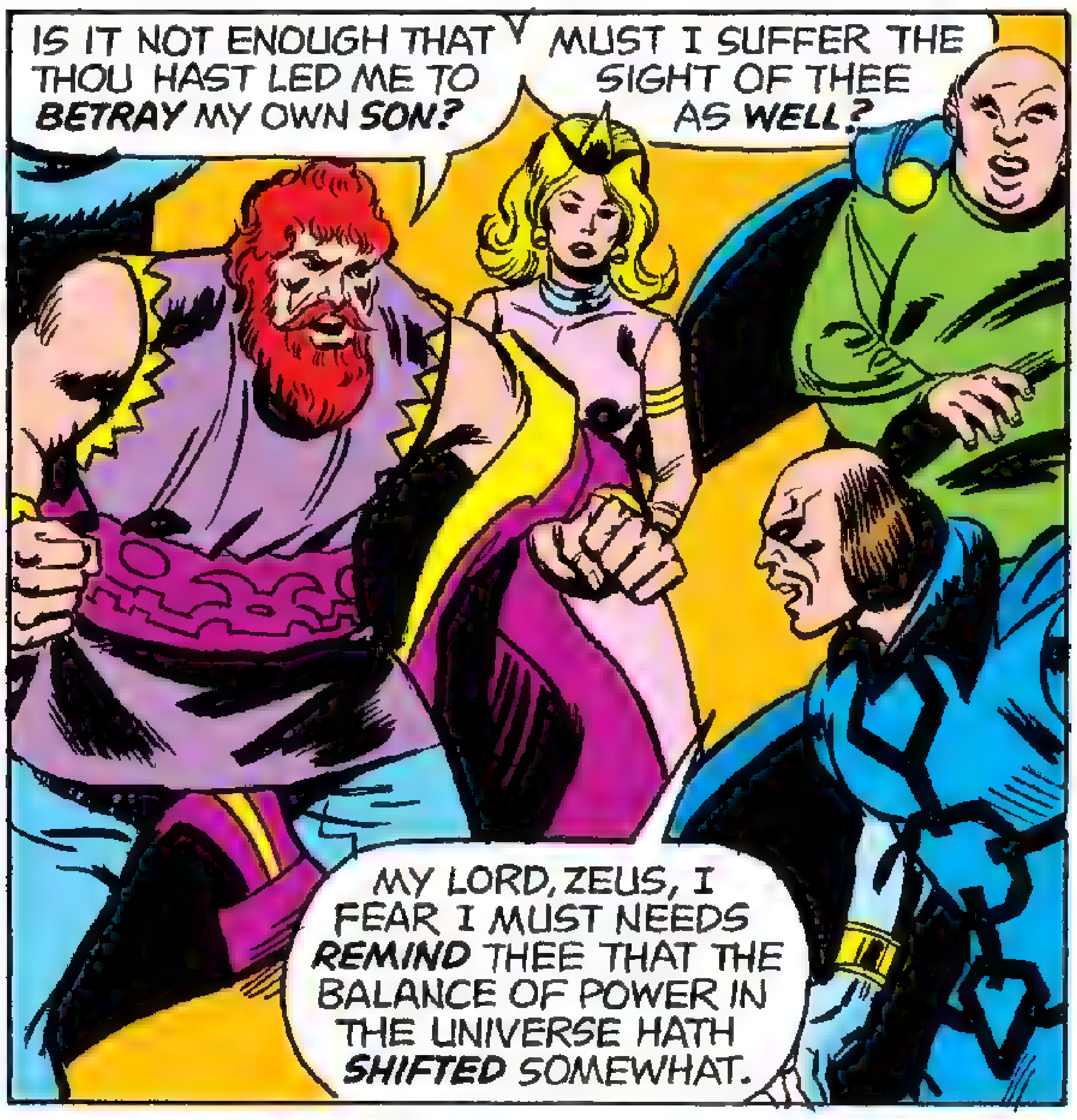

--BUT HE WILL LIE NO **MORE!**
WILT THOU **NEVER** LEARN, HERCULES?
ARES...
UGHN!
HIS **HUMAN** HALF, PLUTO. ALWAYS HATH IT CAUSED THIS MONGREL TO ACT THUS TOWARDS HIS **BETTERS.**
ELSE HOW COULD HE THINK ARES TO STAND **IDLE** WHILE HE DOTH **ATTACK?**
WHUMP!
WAR-GOD, HERCULES DID BUT **THINK--**
--OF THY **PAST** DEFEATS AT HIS HANDS.
SPAK!
PITY **THY** MEMORY DIDST FAIL **THEE!**
HOLD, PRINCE OF POWER!
HE WHO STRIKES MY **ALLY** MUST FACE **MY SWORD** AS WELL, AND I HAVE NO WISH TO **INJURE--**
--MY HUSBAND-TO-**BE.**
HUSBAND-TO-BE!
WOMAN...
CHOOM!
I WOULD **SOONER** MARRY ALL THREE OF THE GORGONS!

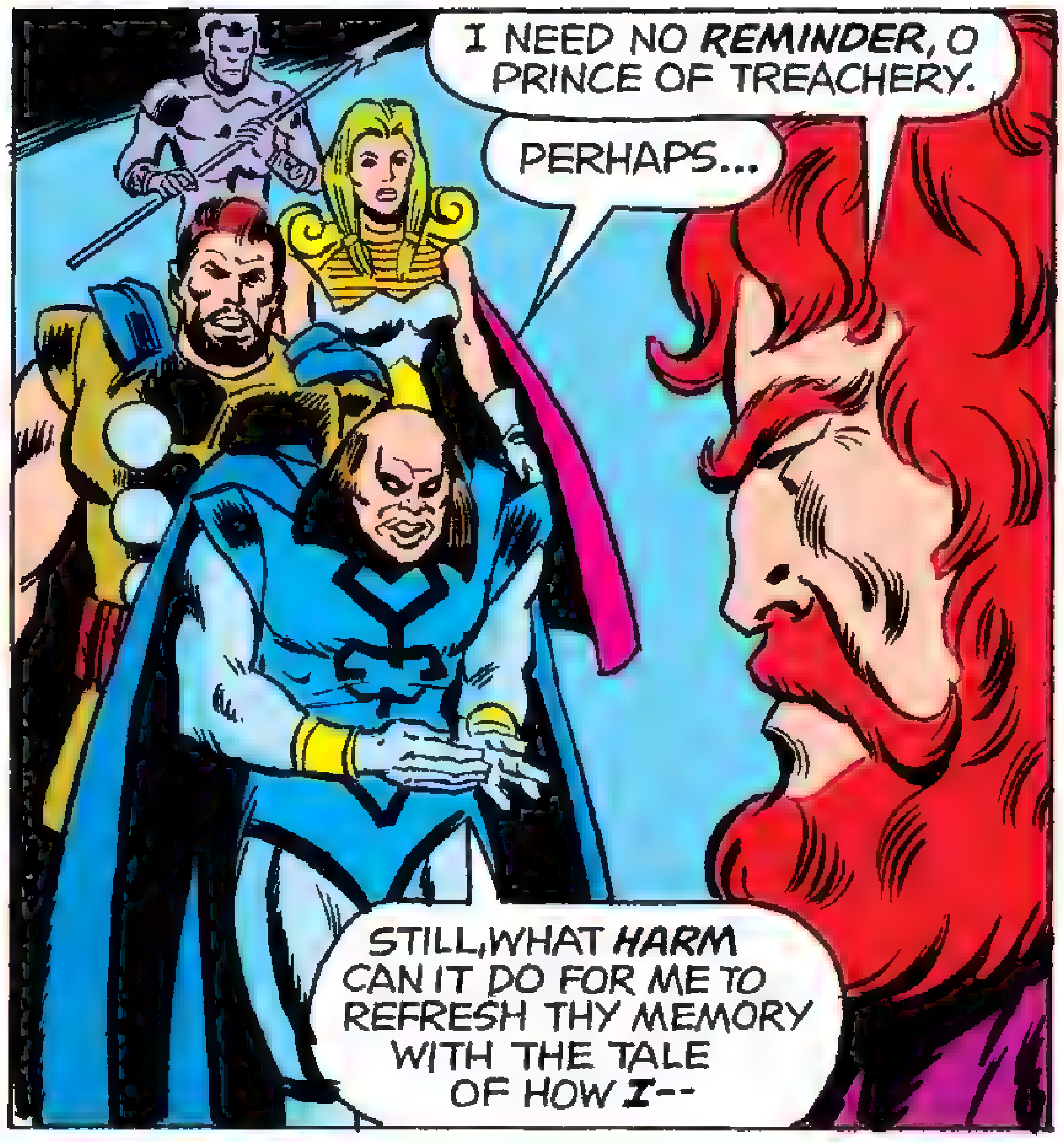

NOW, PLUTO!
NOW IT IS JUST WE TWO WHO BATTLE!
BATTLE, HERCULES?
DOTH THE HAWK BATTLE THE SPARROW?
DOTH THE LION BATTLE THE LAMB?
THY GRIP! NEVER HAVE I FELT ITS LIKE!
WE DO NOT BATTLE, HERCULES.
BATTLE IS BETWIXT EQUALS.
AND THOU CANST NEVER BE--
--PLUTO'S EQUAL!
STARS! HERCULES' STRENGTH DOTH FADE AT THY MEREST TOUCH!
THAT CREEP IS KILLIN' HERK!
THEN MAYBE IT'S TIME WE STOPPED STANDING AROUND STARING LIKE A BUNCH OF GOGGEL-EYED GROUPIES!
WE'VE GOT TO STOP PLUTO!
OR DIE TRYING, ANGEL?
WE CAN'T FIGHT POWER LIKE HIS-- NOT EVEN WITH VENUS ON OUR SIDE!
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO SAVE HERCULES...

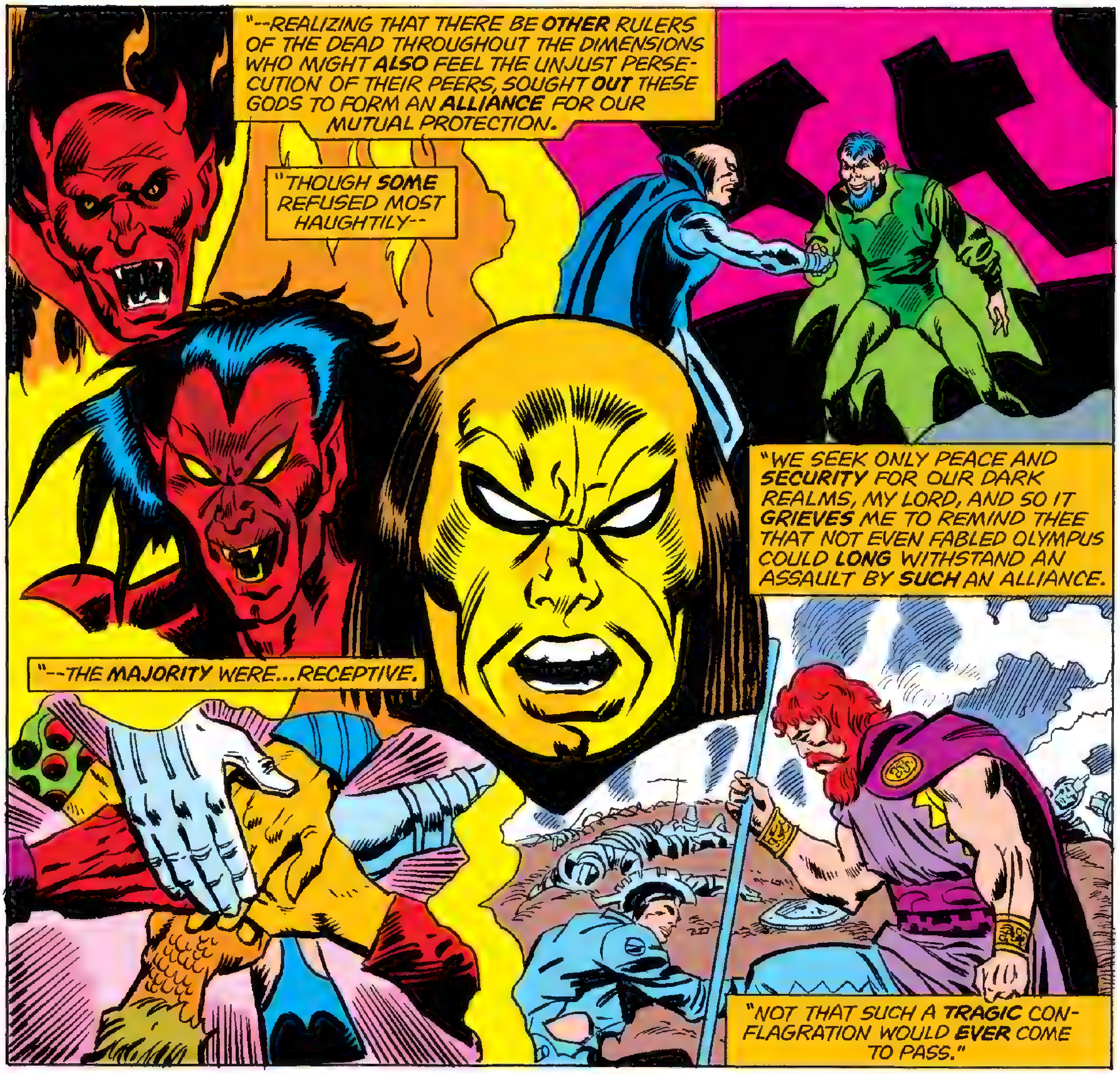

BUT EVEN AS NATASHA ROMANOFF, A.K.A. THE BLACK WIDOW, OUTLINES HER PLAN...
HAH! THOUGH THOU DIDST CHIDE ARES FOR HIS LACK OF MEMORY, THOU--THOU HALF-MORTAL BRAGGART--ART NO LESS FORGETFUL!
THOU DIDST ONCE SIGN AN UNBREAKABLE OLYMPIAN CONTRACT WITH ME, AND THOUGH I DID RELEASE THEE FROM CERTAIN OF ITS CONDITIONS--
--OTHERS ARE YET BINDING!
ALL THY VAUNTED MIGHT IS USELESS AGAINST PLUTO--AND SO SHALL IT EVER REMAIN!*
*AS SHOWN IN THOR #222 & 223--MARV.
SORRY TO SHAKE UP THE STATUS QUO, MISTER--
--BUT THAT'S OUR FRIEND YOU'VE BEEN BEATING ON!
WE TEND TO GET A MITE UPSET OVER THAT SORT OF THING.
WHAT?
YOU DARE ATTACK ME?
FOOLS! I AM THY FINAL MASTER!
I AM PLUTO!
LORD OF THE DEAD!
FAAKKK!

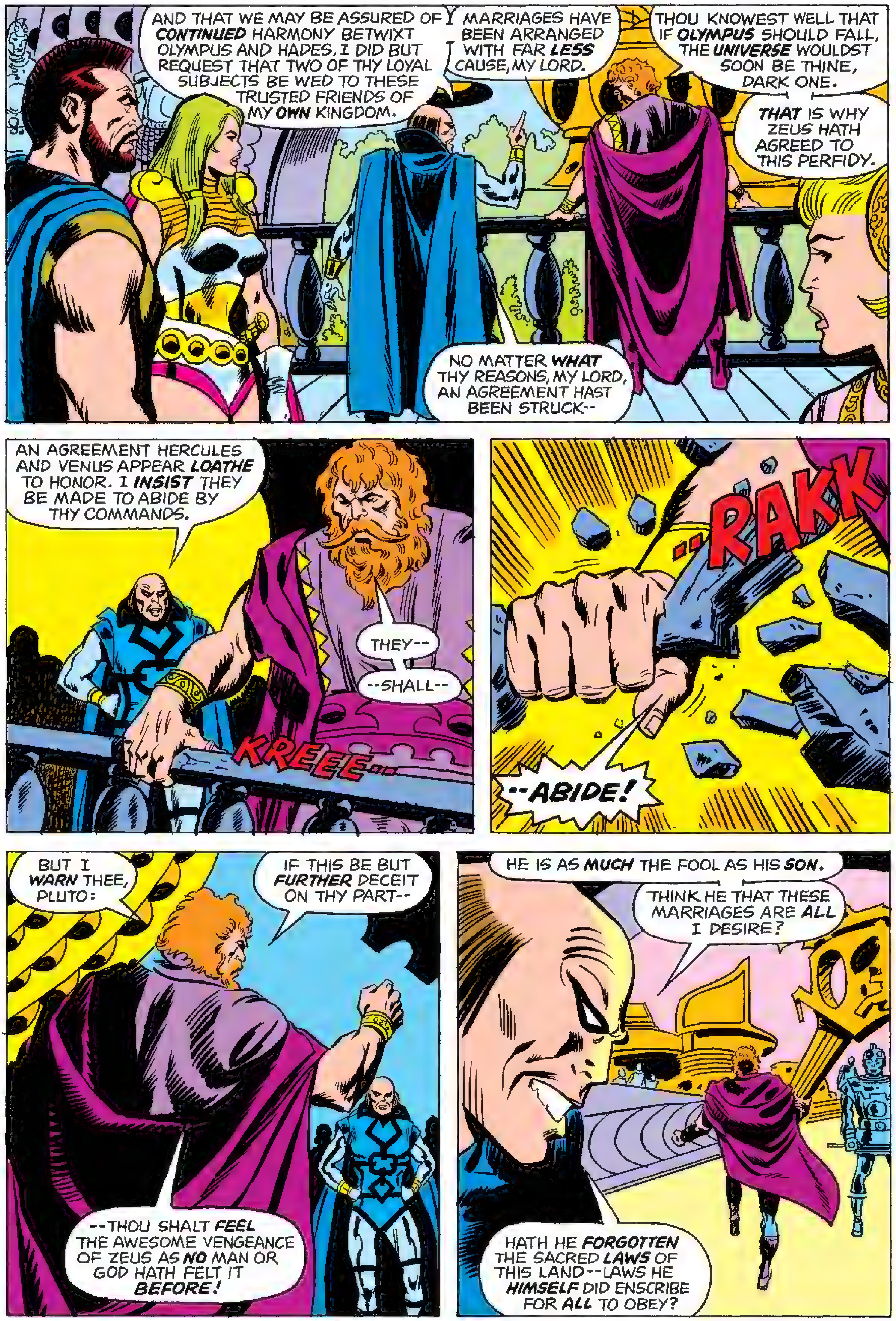

IT **WORKED!** WARREN AND THE GHOST RIDER HAVE DRAWN PLUTO'S ATTENTION AWAY FROM HERCULES SO **WE** CAN DRAG MY COUSIN TO SAFETY.
WE'RE ONLY **HALF**WAY HOME, VENUS.
THE **REST** IS UP TO THE ICEMAN.
NOT TO **WORRY,** LADY.
CONSIDERING THE ASSORTMENT OF CREEPY-CRAWLIES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THESE **"HOLES"** TO OLYMPUS--
--I'LL SEAL IT UP IF I HAVE TO RECONSTRUCT THE **MATTERHORN** ON THE SPOT!
EVEN **THAT** MOUNTAIN OF ICE WON'T HOLD PLUTO AND THE OTHERS FOR LONG.
THEN I SUGGEST WE **VACATE** THIS AREA UNTIL HERCULES RECOVERS.
IF WE'RE GOING TO FACE THAT TRIO **AGAIN,** I'D PREFER HE WERE AT **FULL** STRENGTH.
YOU **CALLED** IT, WIDOW.
I'LL GIVE A LIFT TO MY HUMANITIES PROFESSOR NÉE GODDESS OF LOVE--
--WHILE YOU **SLIDE** THE FRIENDLY SKIES.
THE GHOST RIDER IS GOING TO DO A LITTLE ADVANCE **SCOUTING.**
I'LL BE **DARNED!** IN SPITE OF ALL WE'VE JUST **GONE** THOUGH, WARREN SEEMS MORE **TOGETHER** THAN HE'S BEEN IN **MONTHS!**
MAYBE THIS IMPROMPTU COFFEE KLATCH IS **AGREEING** WITH HIM.

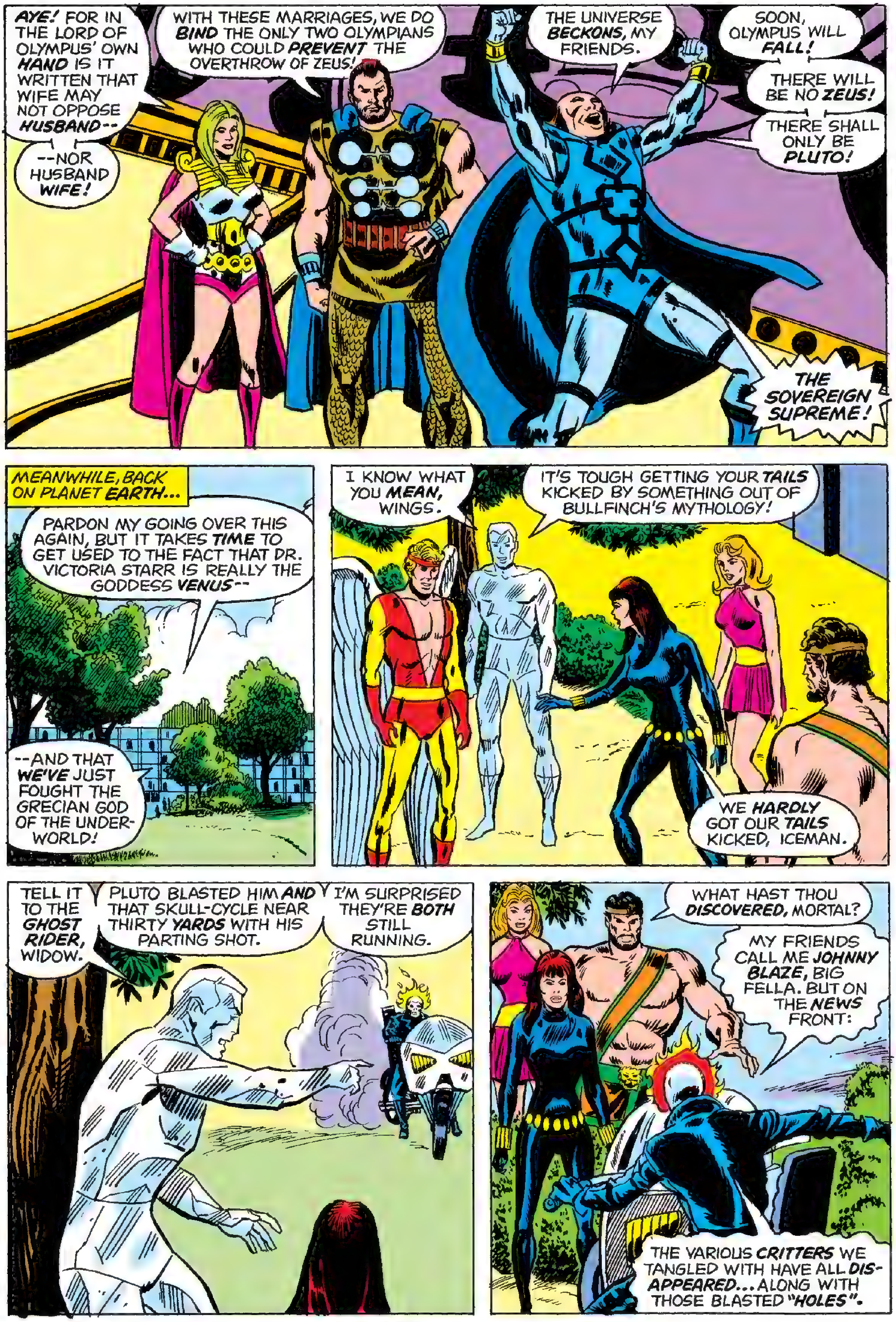

WHILE, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE INQUISITIVE BOBBY DRAKE'S HANDIWORK...
PLUTO, IF YON BARRIER REMAINS UNSHATTERED, WE CANNOT PURSUE OUR FOES.
SO WHY DOST THOU WITHHOLD THY POWER FROM THIS TASK?
BECAUSE, O QUEEN, I PERCEIVE 'TIS UNNECESSARY.
SO UNNECESSARY THAT I HAVE ALREADY RETURNED OUR DEFEATED WARRIORS TO OLYMPUS.
HERCULES AND VENUS WILL NEVER SUBMIT TO US.
BUT THERE BE ONE WHO CAN COMPEL THEIR OBEDIENCE.
AND SINCE IT BE "HIS" WISH THAT THOU WED OUR MOST UNCOOPERATIVE GODLINGS--
--LET US TAKE LEAVE OF THIS PLACE AND SEEK AUDIENCE WITH--
--ZEUS!
PLUTO, THOU BASEST OF VILLAINS!
THOU DAREST TO FOUL THIS HALLOWED AIR WITH THINE STYGIAN PRESENCE?

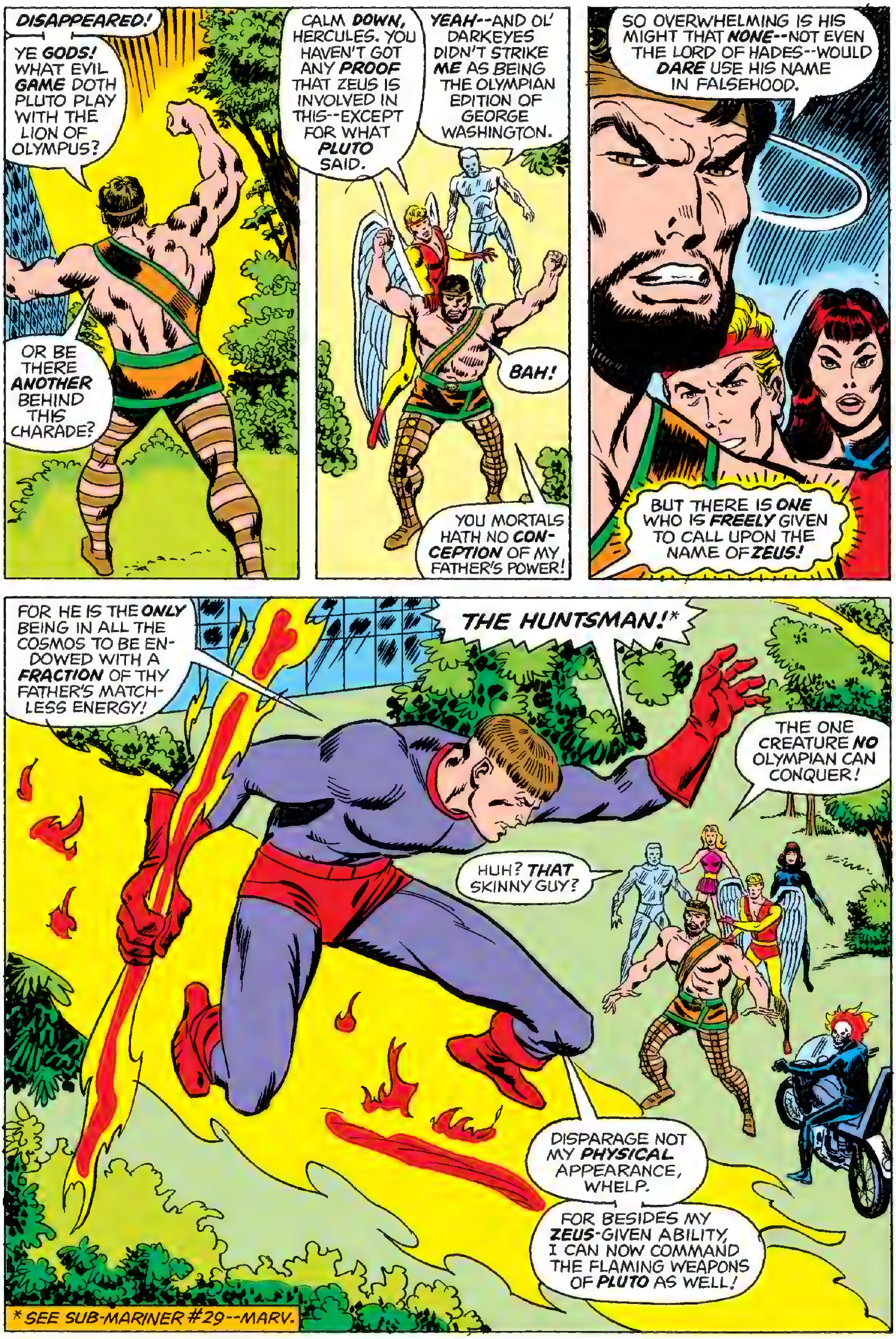

IS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT THOU HAST LED ME TO **BETRAY** MY OWN **SON?**
MUST I SUFFER THE SIGHT OF THEE AS **WELL?**
MY LORD, ZEUS, I FEAR I MUST NEEDS **REMIND** THEE THAT THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE UNIVERSE HATH **SHIFTED** SOMEWHAT.

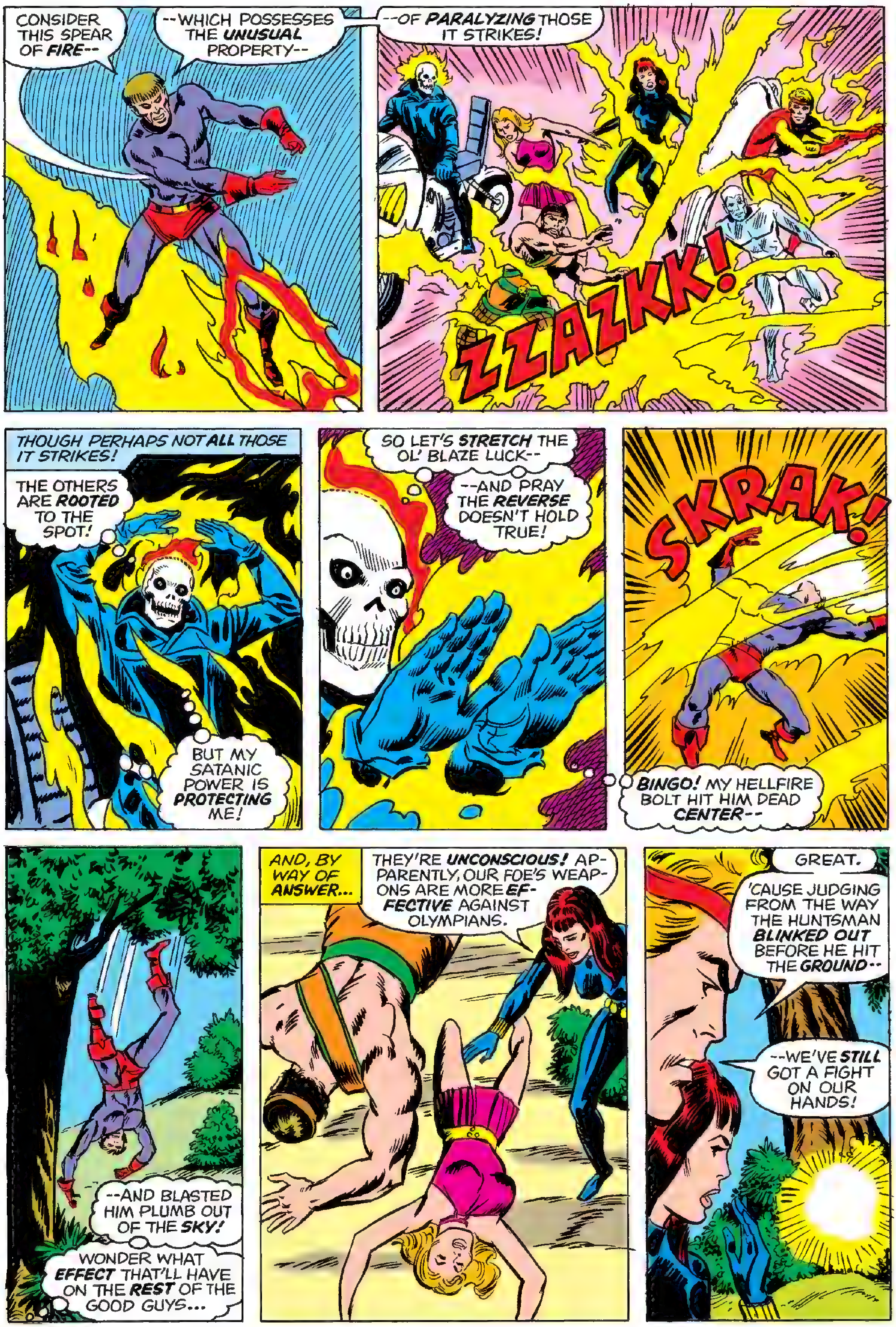

I NEED NO **REMINDER**, O PRINCE OF TREACHERY.
PERHAPS...
STILL, WHAT **HARM** CAN IT DO FOR ME TO REFRESH THY MEMORY WITH THE TALE OF HOW **I**--

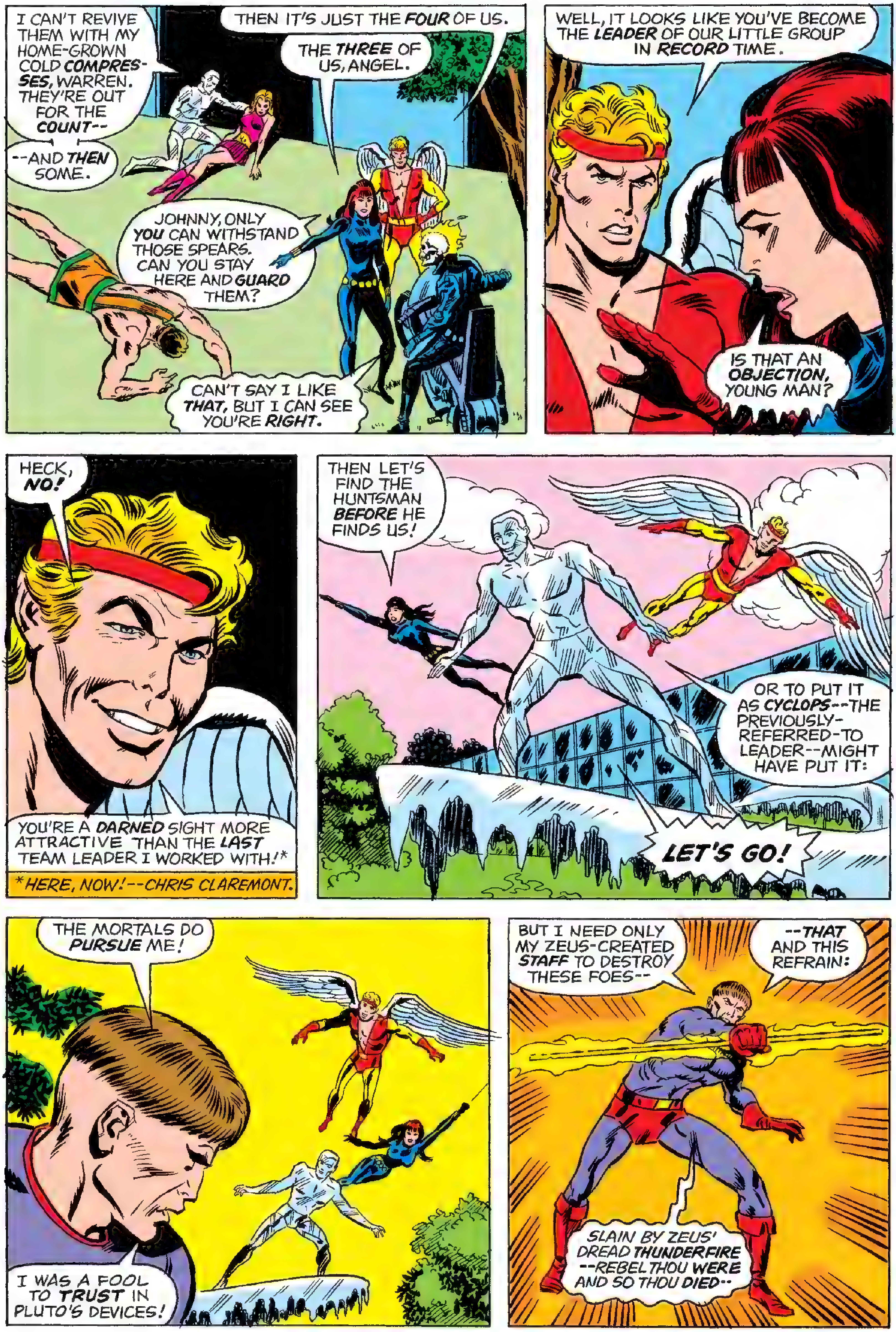

"--REALIZING THAT THERE BE **OTHER** RULERS OF THE DEAD THROUGHOUT THE DIMENSIONS WHO MIGHT **ALSO** FEEL THE UNJUST PERSECUTION OF THEIR PEERS, SOUGHT **OUT** THESE GODS TO FORM AN **ALLIANCE** FOR OUR MUTUAL PROTECTION.
"THOUGH **SOME** REFUSED MOST HAUGHTILY--
"--THE **MAJORITY** WERE...RECEPTIVE.
"WE SEEK ONLY PEACE AND **SECURITY** FOR OUR DARK REALMS, MY LORD, AND SO IT **GRIEVES** ME TO REMIND THEE THAT NOT EVEN FABLED OLYMPUS COULD **LONG** WITHSTAND AN ASSAULT BY **SUCH** AN ALLIANCE.
"NOT THAT SUCH A **TRAGIC** CONFLAGRATION WOULD **EVER** COME TO PASS."

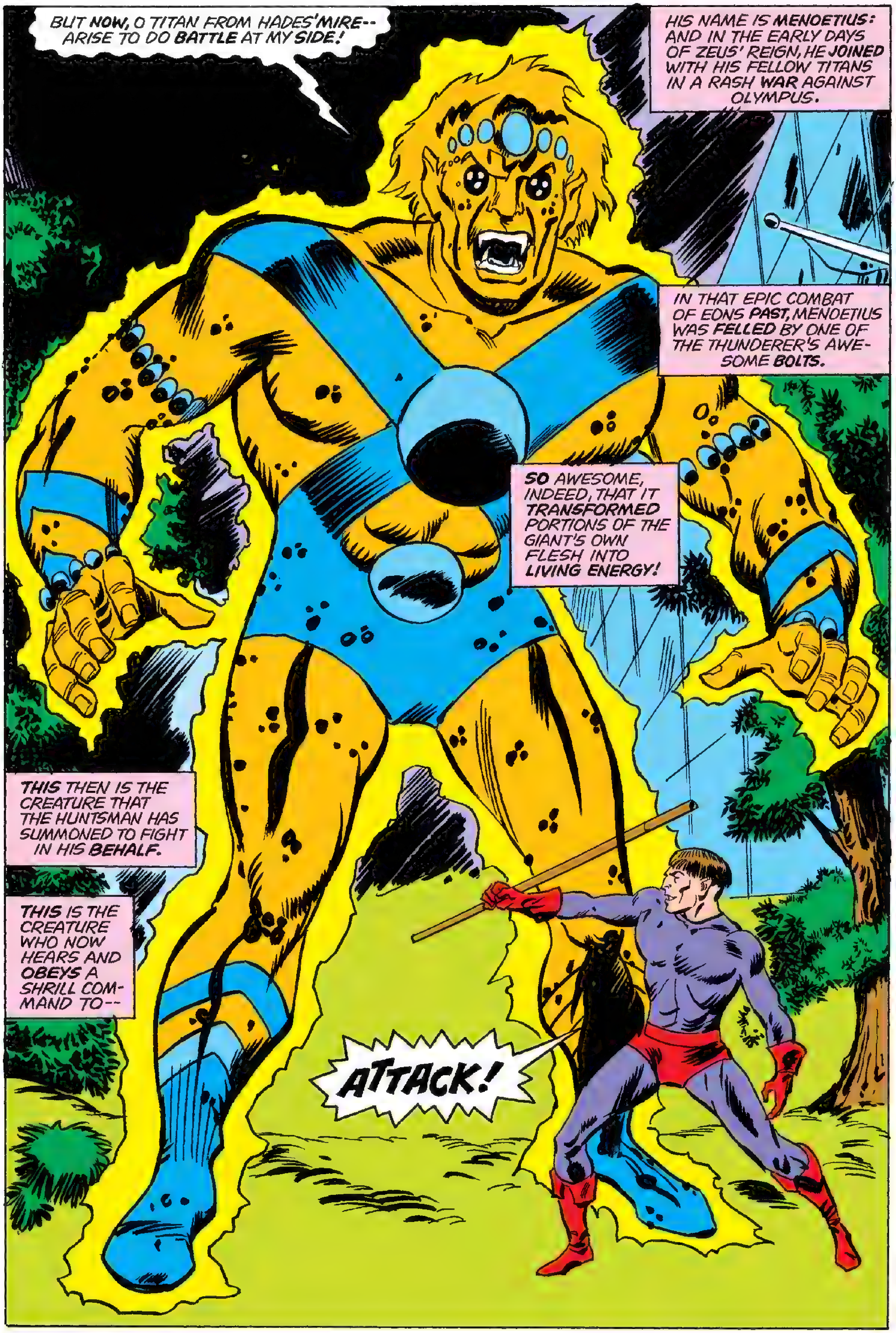

AND THAT WE MAY BE ASSURED OF **CONTINUED** HARMONY BETWIXT OLYMPUS AND HADES, I DID BUT REQUEST THAT TWO OF THY LOYAL SUBJECTS BE WED TO THESE TRUSTED FRIENDS OF MY **OWN** KINGDOM.
MARRIAGES HAVE BEEN ARRANGED WITH FAR **LESS** CAUSE, MY LORD.
THOU KNOWEST WELL THAT IF **OLYMPUS** SHOULD FALL, THE **UNIVERSE** WOULDST SOON BE THINE, DARK ONE.
THAT IS WHY ZEUS HATH AGREED TO THIS PERFIDY.
NO MATTER **WHAT** THY REASONS, MY LORD, AN AGREEMENT HAST BEEN STRUCK--
AN AGREEMENT HERCULES AND VENUS APPEAR **LOATHE** TO HONOR. I **INSIST** THEY BE MADE TO ABIDE BY THY COMMANDS.
THEY--
--SHALL--
KREEEE...
..RAKK
--**ABIDE!**
BUT I **WARN** THEE, PLUTO:
IF THIS BE BUT **FURTHER** DECEIT ON THY PART--
--THOU SHALT **FEEL** THE AWESOME VENGEANCE OF ZEUS AS **NO** MAN OR GOD HATH FELT IT **BEFORE!**
HE IS AS **MUCH** THE FOOL AS HIS **SON**.
THINK HE THAT THESE MARRIAGES ARE **ALL** I DESIRE?
HATH HE **FORGOTTEN** THE SACRED **LAWS** OF THIS LAND--LAWS HE **HIMSELF** DID ENSCRIBE FOR **ALL** TO OBEY?

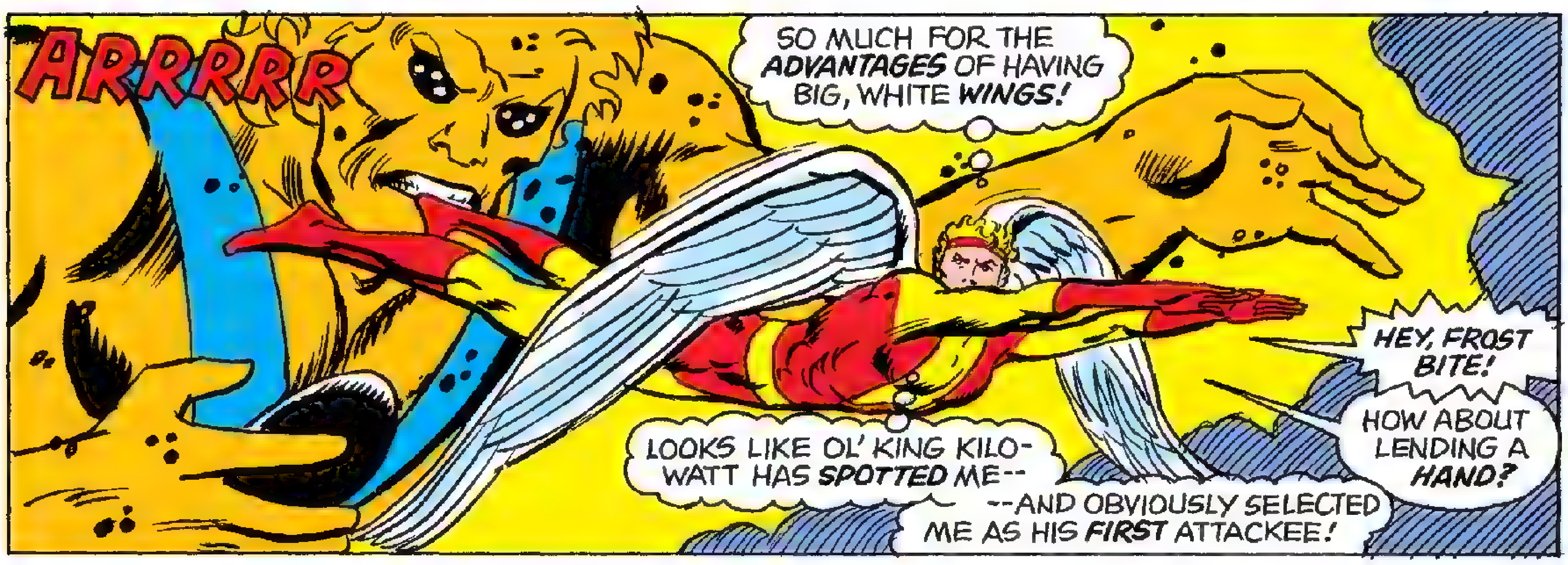

AYE! FOR IN THE LORD OF OLYMPUS' OWN HAND IS IT WRITTEN THAT WIFE MAY NOT OPPOSE HUSBAND--
--NOR HUSBAND WIFE!
WITH THESE MARRIAGES, WE DO BIND THE ONLY TWO OLYMPIANS WHO COULD PREVENT THE OVERTHROW OF ZEUS!
THE UNIVERSE BECKONS, MY FRIENDS.
SOON, OLYMPUS WILL FALL!
THERE WILL BE NO ZEUS!
THERE SHALL ONLY BE PLUTO!
THE SOVEREIGN SUPREME!
MEANWHILE, BACK ON PLANET EARTH...
PARDON MY GOING OVER THIS AGAIN, BUT IT TAKES TIME TO GET USED TO THE FACT THAT DR. VICTORIA STARR IS REALLY THE GODDESS VENUS--
--AND THAT WE'VE JUST FOUGHT THE GRECIAN GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD!
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, WINGS.
IT'S TOUGH GETTING YOUR TAILS KICKED BY SOMETHING OUT OF BULLFINCH'S MYTHOLOGY!
WE HARDLY GOT OUR TAILS KICKED, ICEMAN.
TELL IT TO THE GHOST RIDER, WIDOW.
PLUTO BLASTED HIM AND THAT SKULL-CYCLE NEAR THIRTY YARDS WITH HIS PARTING SHOT.
I'M SURPRISED THEY'RE BOTH STILL RUNNING.
WHAT HAST THOU DISCOVERED, MORTAL?
MY FRIENDS CALL ME JOHNNY BLAZE, BIG FELLA. BUT ON THE NEWS FRONT:
THE VARIOUS CRITTERS WE TANGLED WITH HAVE ALL DISAPPEARED... ALONG WITH THOSE BLASTED "HOLES".

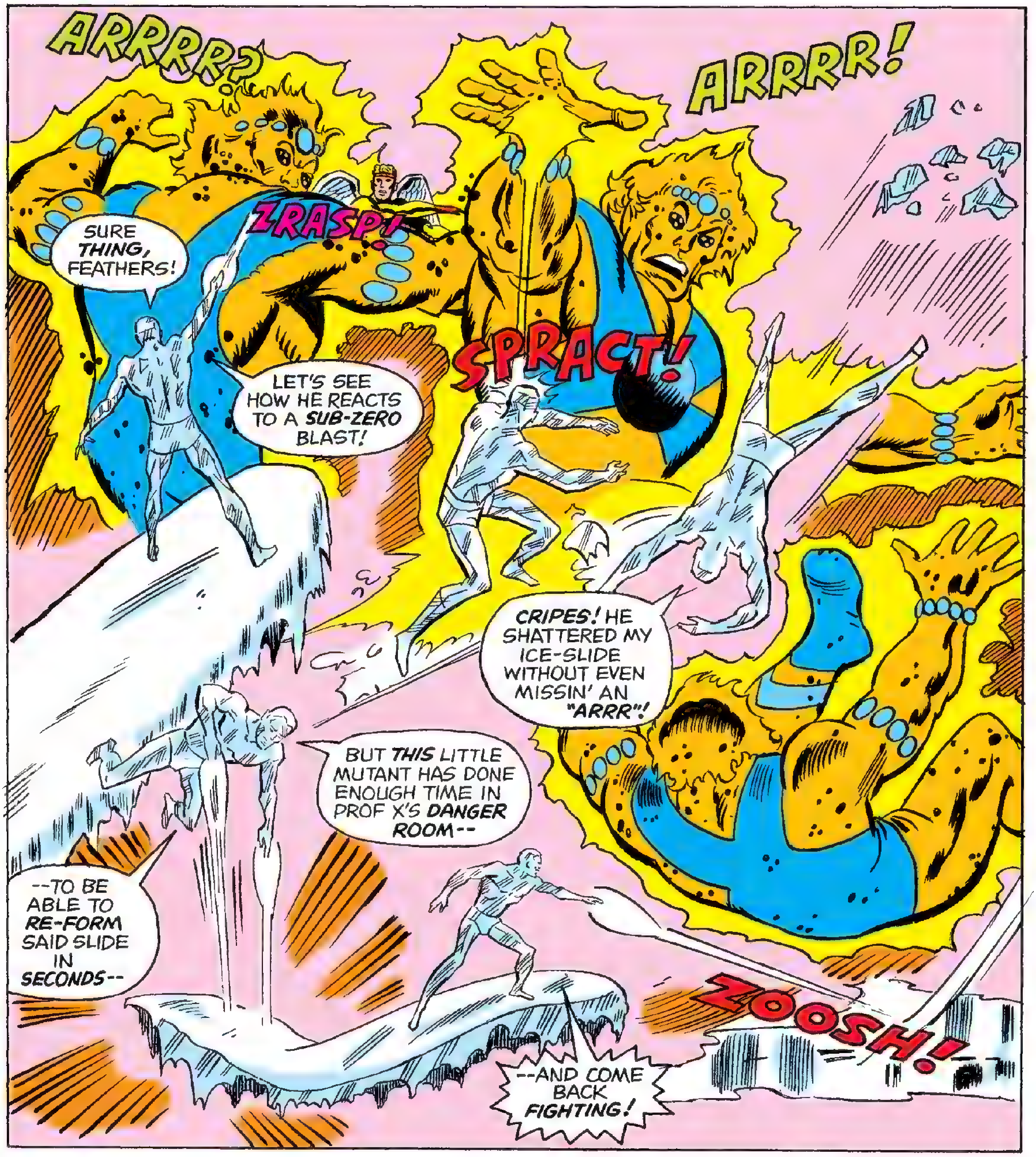

DISAPPEARED!
YE GODS! WHAT EVIL GAME DOTH PLUTO PLAY WITH THE LION OF OLYMPUS?
OR BE THERE ANOTHER BEHIND THIS CHARADE?
CALM DOWN, HERCULES. YOU HAVEN'T GOT ANY PROOF THAT ZEUS IS INVOLVED IN THIS--EXCEPT FOR WHAT PLUTO SAID.
YEAH--AND OL' DARKEYES DIDN'T STRIKE ME AS BEING THE OLYMPIAN EDITION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON.
BAH!
YOU MORTALS HATH NO CONCEPTION OF MY FATHER'S POWER!
SO OVERWHELMING IS HIS MIGHT THAT NONE--NOT EVEN THE LORD OF HADES--WOULD DARE USE HIS NAME IN FALSEHOOD.
BUT THERE IS ONE WHO IS FREELY GIVEN TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF ZEUS!
FOR HE IS THE ONLY BEING IN ALL THE COSMOS TO BE ENDOWED WITH A FRACTION OF THY FATHER'S MATCHLESS ENERGY!
THE HUNTSMAN!*
THE ONE CREATURE NO OLYMPIAN CAN CONQUER!
HUH? THAT SKINNY GUY?
DISPARAGE NOT MY PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, WHELP.
FOR BESIDES MY ZEUS-GIVEN ABILITY, I CAN NOW COMMAND THE FLAMING WEAPONS OF PLUTO AS WELL!
*SEE SUB-MARINER #29--MARV.

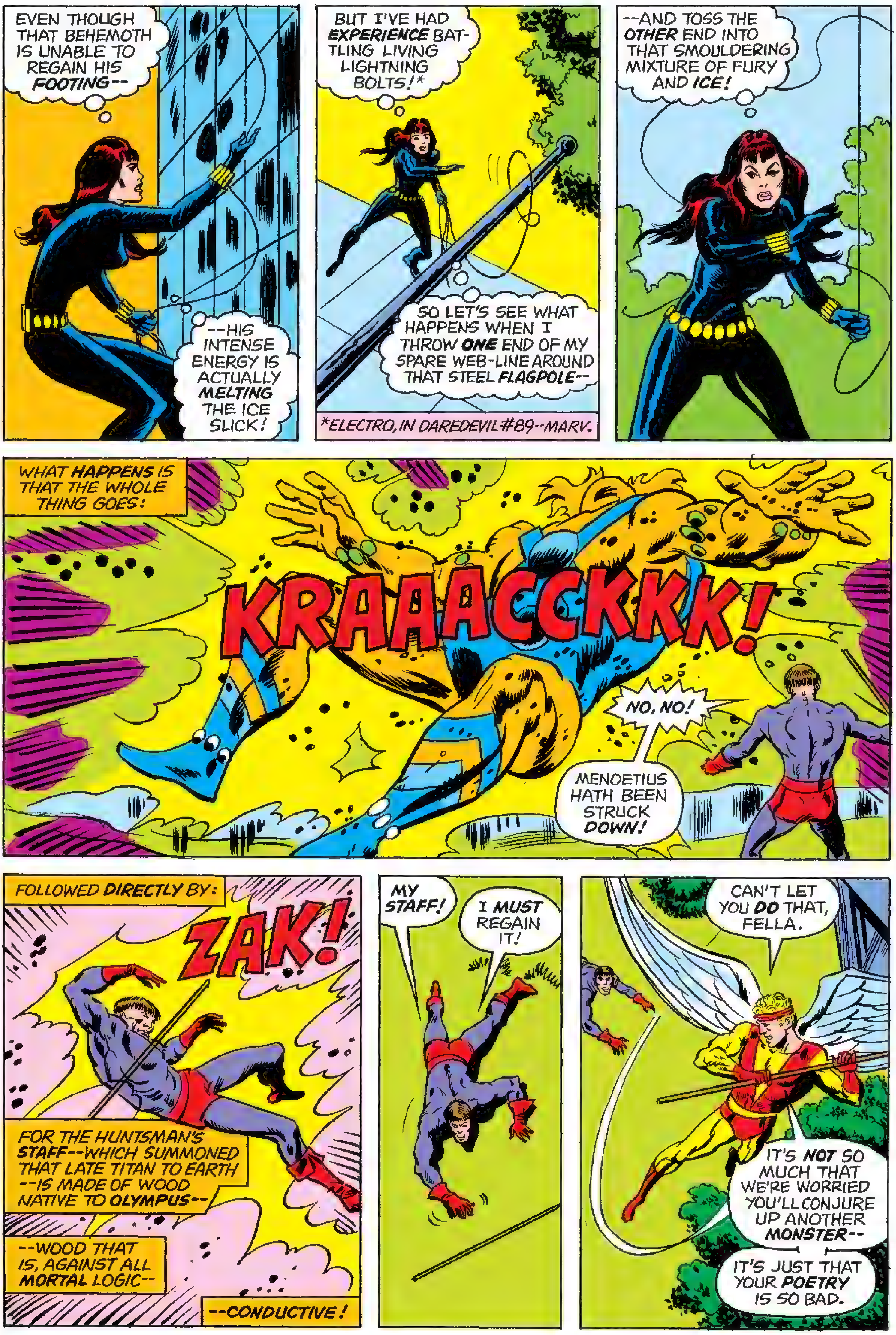

CONSIDER THIS SPEAR OF *FIRE*--
--WHICH POSSESSES THE *UNUSUAL* PROPERTY--
--OF *PARALYZING* THOSE IT STRIKES!
ZZAZKK!
THOUGH PERHAPS NOT *ALL* THOSE IT STRIKES!
THE OTHERS ARE *ROOTED* TO THE SPOT!
BUT MY SATANIC POWER IS *PROTECTING* ME!
SO LET'S *STRETCH* THE OL' BLAZE LUCK--
--AND PRAY THE *REVERSE* DOESN'T HOLD TRUE!
SKRAK!
BINGO! MY HELLFIRE BOLT HIT HIM DEAD *CENTER*--
--AND BLASTED HIM PLUMB OUT OF THE *SKY!*
WONDER WHAT *EFFECT* THAT'LL HAVE ON THE *REST* OF THE GOOD GUYS...
AND, BY WAY OF ANSWER...
THEY'RE *UNCONSCIOUS!* APPARENTLY, OUR FOE'S WEAPONS ARE MORE *EFFECTIVE* AGAINST OLYMPIANS.
GREAT.
'CAUSE JUDGING FROM THE WAY THE HUNTSMAN *BLINKED OUT* BEFORE HE HIT THE *GROUND*--
--WE'VE *STILL* GOT A FIGHT ON OUR HANDS!

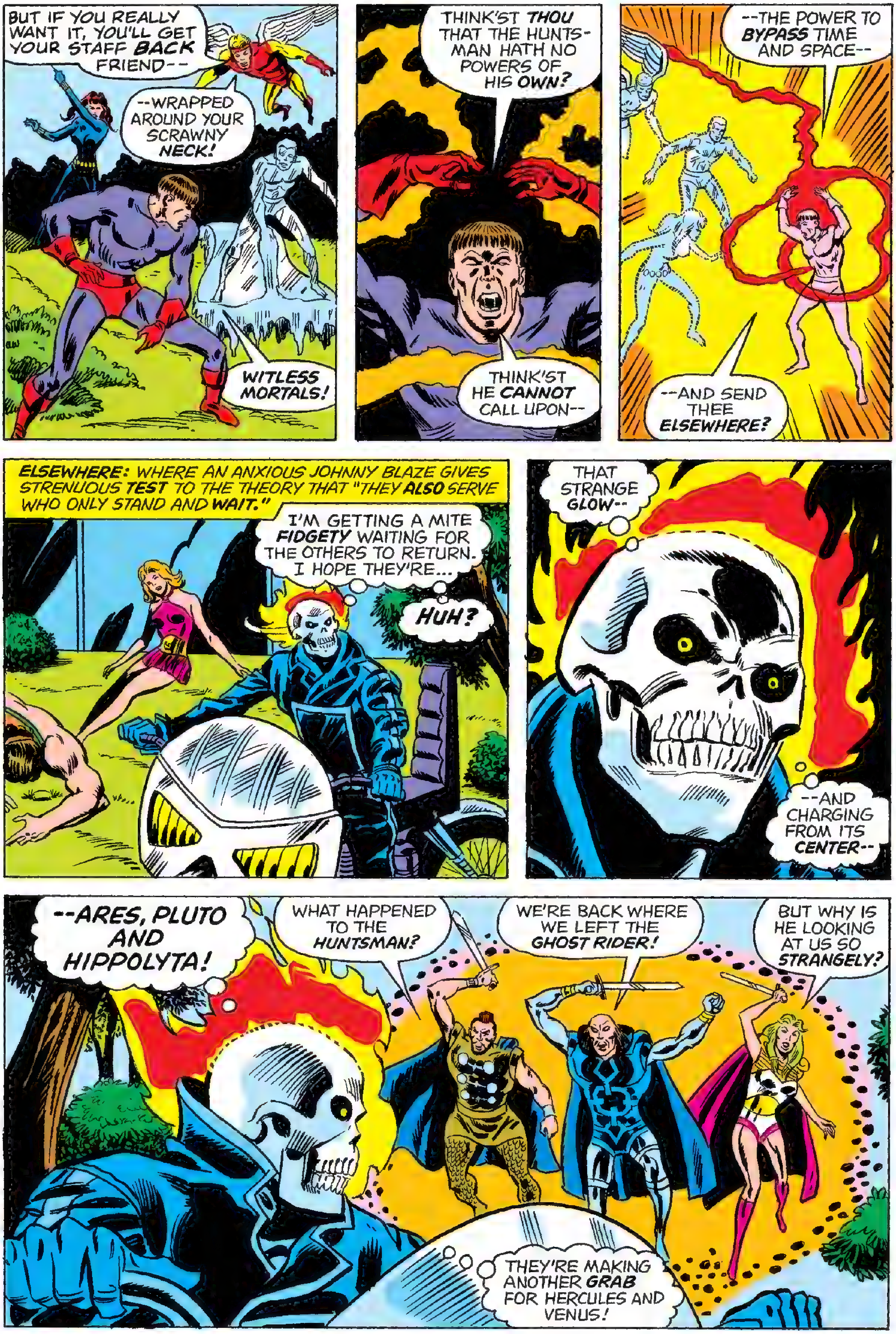

I CAN'T REVIVE THEM WITH MY HOME-GROWN COLD COMPRESSES, WARREN. THEY'RE OUT FOR THE COUNT--
--AND THEN SOME.
THEN IT'S JUST THE FOUR OF US.
THE THREE OF US, ANGEL.
JOHNNY, ONLY YOU CAN WITHSTAND THOSE SPEARS. CAN YOU STAY HERE AND GUARD THEM?
CAN'T SAY I LIKE THAT, BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE RIGHT.
WELL, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE BECOME THE LEADER OF OUR LITTLE GROUP IN RECORD TIME.
IS THAT AN OBJECTION, YOUNG MAN?
HECK, NO!
YOU'RE A DARNED SIGHT MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN THE LAST TEAM LEADER I WORKED WITH!*
*HERE, NOW!--CHRIS CLAREMONT.
THEN LET'S FIND THE HUNTSMAN BEFORE HE FINDS US!
OR TO PUT IT AS CYCLOPS--THE PREVIOUSLY-REFERRED-TO LEADER--MIGHT HAVE PUT IT:
LET'S GO!
THE MORTALS DO PURSUE ME!
I WAS A FOOL TO TRUST IN PLUTO'S DEVICES!
BUT I NEED ONLY MY ZEUS-CREATED STAFF TO DESTROY THESE FOES--
--THAT AND THIS REFRAIN:
SLAIN BY ZEUS' DREAD THUNDERFIRE --REBEL THOU WERE AND SO THOU DIED--

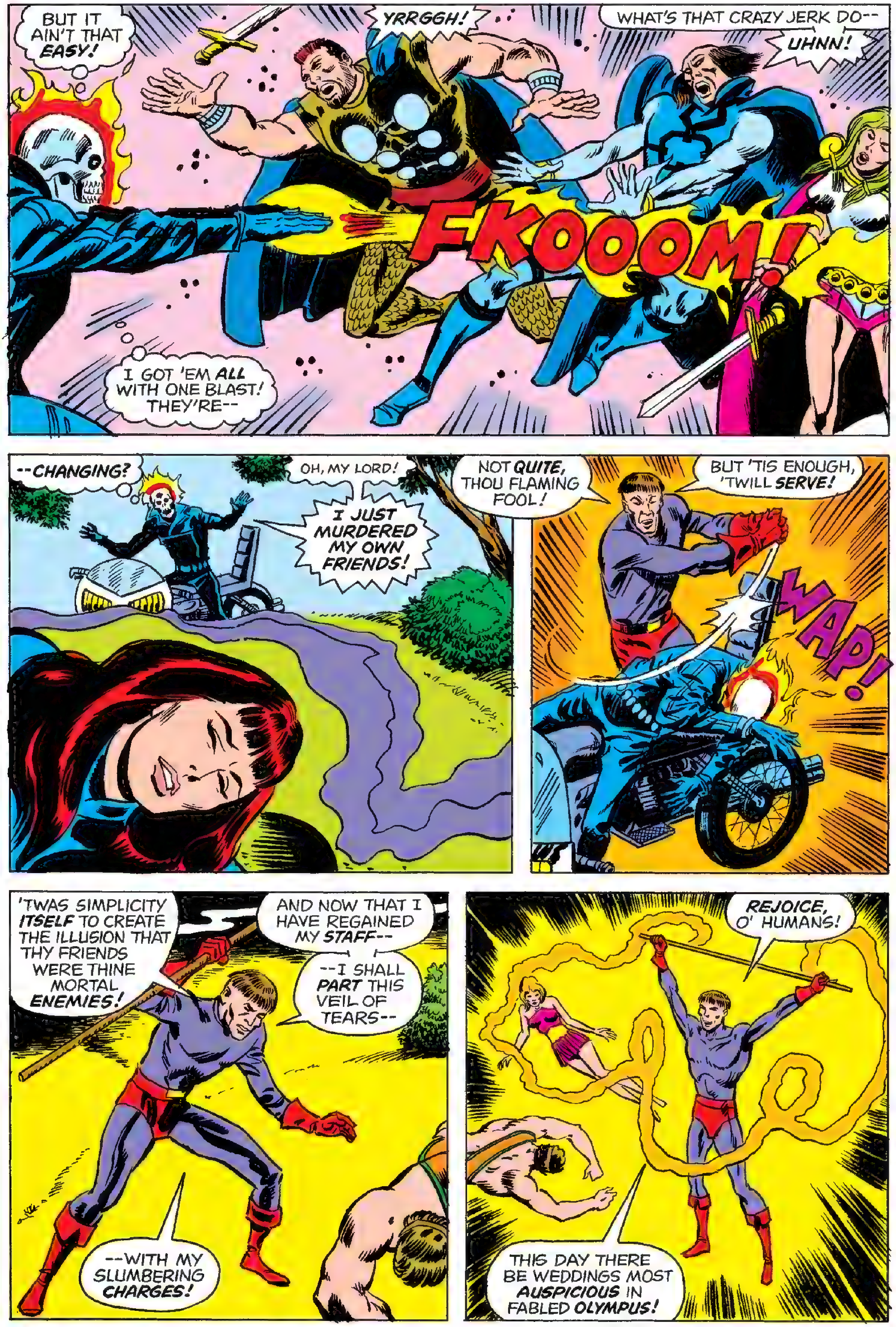

BUT **NOW**, O TITAN FROM HADES' **MIRE**--
ARISE TO DO **BATTLE** AT MY **SIDE**!
HIS NAME IS **MENOETIUS**: AND IN THE EARLY DAYS OF ZEUS' REIGN, HE **JOINED** WITH HIS FELLOW TITANS IN A RASH **WAR** AGAINST OLYMPUS.
IN THAT EPIC COMBAT OF EONS **PAST**, MENOETIUS WAS **FELLED** BY ONE OF THE THUNDERER'S AWESOME **BOLTS**.
SO AWESOME, INDEED, THAT IT **TRANSFORMED** PORTIONS OF THE GIANT'S OWN FLESH INTO **LIVING ENERGY**!
THIS THEN IS THE CREATURE THAT THE HUNTSMAN HAS SUMMONED TO FIGHT IN HIS **BEHALF**.
THIS IS THE CREATURE WHO NOW HEARS AND **OBEYS** A SHRILL COMMAND TO--
ATTACK!

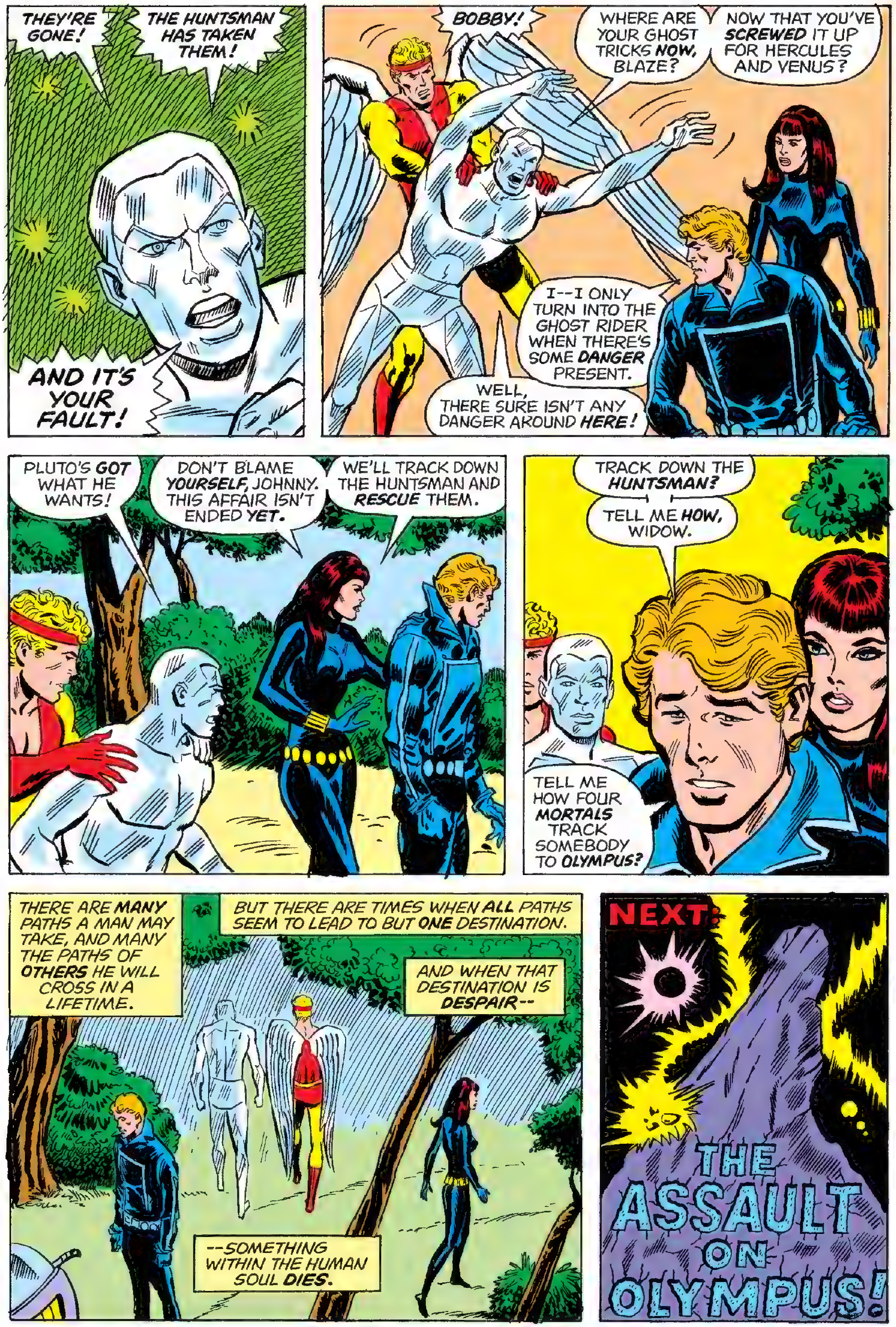

ARRRRRR
SO MUCH FOR THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING BIG, WHITE WINGS!
LOOKS LIKE OL' KING KILOWATT HAS SPOTTED ME--
--AND OBVIOUSLY SELECTED ME AS HIS FIRST ATTACKEE!
HEY, FROST BITE!
HOW ABOUT LENDING A HAND?


ARRRRR?
ARRRR!
ZRASP!
SURE THING, FEATHERS!
LET'S SEE HOW HE REACTS TO A SUB-ZERO BLAST!
SPRACT!
CRIPES! HE SHATTERED MY ICE-SLIDE WITHOUT EVEN MISSIN' AN "ARRR"!
BUT THIS LITTLE MUTANT HAS DONE ENOUGH TIME IN PROF X'S DANGER ROOM--
--TO BE ABLE TO RE-FORM SAID SLIDE IN SECONDS--
--AND COME BACK FIGHTING!
ZOOSH!


EVEN THOUGH THAT BEHEMOTH IS UNABLE TO REGAIN HIS *FOOTING*--
--HIS INTENSE ENERGY IS ACTUALLY *MELTING* THE ICE SLICK!
BUT I'VE HAD *EXPERIENCE* BATTLING LIVING LIGHTNING BOLTS!*
SO LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I THROW *ONE* END OF MY SPARE WEB-LINE AROUND THAT STEEL *FLAGPOLE*--
*ELECTRO, IN DAREDEVIL #89--MARV.
--AND TOSS THE *OTHER* END INTO THAT SMOULDERING MIXTURE OF FURY AND *ICE!*
WHAT *HAPPENS* IS THAT THE WHOLE THING GOES:
KRAAACCKKK!
NO, NO!
MENOETIUS HATH BEEN STRUCK *DOWN!*
FOLLOWED *DIRECTLY* BY:
ZAK!
FOR THE HUNTSMAN'S *STAFF*--WHICH SUMMONED THAT LATE TITAN TO EARTH --IS MADE OF WOOD NATIVE TO *OLYMPUS*--
--WOOD THAT IS, AGAINST ALL *MORTAL* LOGIC--
--*CONDUCTIVE!*
MY STAFF!
I *MUST* REGAIN IT!
CAN'T LET YOU *DO* THAT, FELLA.
IT'S *NOT* SO MUCH THAT WE'RE WORRIED YOU'LL CONJURE UP ANOTHER *MONSTER*--
IT'S JUST THAT YOUR *POETRY* IS SO BAD.


BUT IF YOU REALLY WANT IT, YOU'LL GET YOUR STAFF **BACK** FRIEND--
--WRAPPED AROUND YOUR SCRAWNY **NECK!**
WITLESS MORTALS!
THINK'ST **THOU** THAT THE HUNTSMAN HATH NO POWERS OF HIS **OWN?**
THINK'ST HE **CANNOT** CALL UPON--
--THE POWER TO **BYPASS** TIME AND SPACE--
--AND SEND THEE **ELSEWHERE?**
ELSEWHERE: *WHERE AN ANXIOUS JOHNNY BLAZE GIVES STRENUOUS* ***TEST*** *TO THE THEORY THAT "THEY* ***ALSO*** *SERVE WHO ONLY STAND AND* ***WAIT."***
I'M GETTING A MITE **FIDGETY** WAITING FOR THE OTHERS TO RETURN. I HOPE THEY'RE...
HUH?
THAT STRANGE **GLOW**--
--AND CHARGING FROM ITS **CENTER**--
--ARES, PLUTO AND HIPPOLYTA!
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE **HUNTSMAN?**
WE'RE BACK WHERE WE LEFT THE **GHOST RIDER!**
BUT WHY IS HE LOOKING AT US SO **STRANGELY?**
THEY'RE MAKING ANOTHER **GRAB** FOR HERCULES AND VENUS!


BUT IT AIN'T THAT EASY!
YRRGGH!
WHAT'S THAT CRAZY JERK DO--
UHNN!
FKOOOM!
I GOT 'EM ALL WITH ONE BLAST! THEY'RE--
--CHANGING?
OH, MY LORD!
I JUST MURDERED MY OWN FRIENDS!
NOT QUITE, THOU FLAMING FOOL!
BUT 'TIS ENOUGH, 'TWILL SERVE!
WAP!
'TWAS SIMPLICITY ITSELF TO CREATE THE ILLUSION THAT THY FRIENDS WERE THINE MORTAL ENEMIES!
AND NOW THAT I HAVE REGAINED MY STAFF--
--I SHALL PART THIS VEIL OF TEARS--
--WITH MY SLUMBERING CHARGES!
REJOICE, O' HUMANS!
THIS DAY THERE BE WEDDINGS MOST AUSPICIOUS IN FABLED OLYMPUS!


THEY'RE GONE!
THE HUNTSMAN HAS TAKEN THEM!
AND IT'S YOUR FAULT!
BOBBY!
WHERE ARE YOUR GHOST TRICKS NOW, BLAZE?
NOW THAT YOU'VE SCREWED IT UP FOR HERCULES AND VENUS?
I--I ONLY TURN INTO THE GHOST RIDER WHEN THERE'S SOME DANGER PRESENT.
WELL, THERE SURE ISN'T ANY DANGER AROUND HERE!
PLUTO'S GOT WHAT HE WANTS!
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, JOHNNY. THIS AFFAIR ISN'T ENDED YET.
WE'LL TRACK DOWN THE HUNTSMAN AND RESCUE THEM.
TRACK DOWN THE HUNTSMAN?
TELL ME HOW, WIDOW.
TELL ME HOW FOUR MORTALS TRACK SOMEBODY TO OLYMPUS?
THERE ARE MANY PATHS A MAN MAY TAKE, AND MANY THE PATHS OF OTHERS HE WILL CROSS IN A LIFETIME.
BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN ALL PATHS SEEM TO LEAD TO BUT ONE DESTINATION.
AND WHEN THAT DESTINATION IS DESPAIR--
--SOMETHING WITHIN THE HUMAN SOUL DIES.
NEXT:
THE ASSAULT ON OLYMPUS!

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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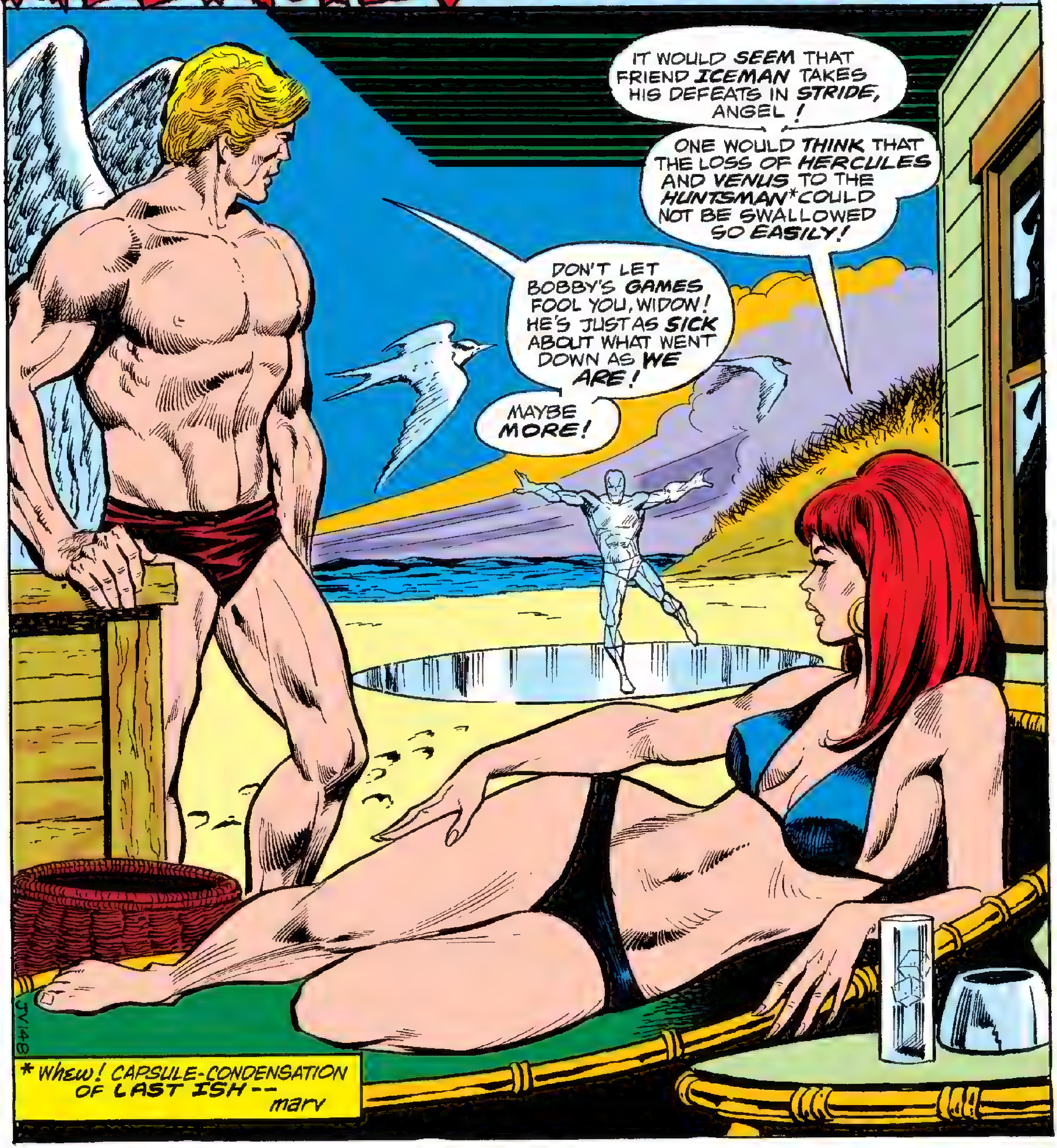
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
TM
EVEN IF THY SON AND HIS COMRADES SURVIVE THIS COMBAT, ZEUS--
--STILL ARE THEY CONDEMNED TO HELL!
AND I AM POWERLESS TO AID THEM!
BUCKLER ADKINS
ASSAULT ON OLYMPUS!

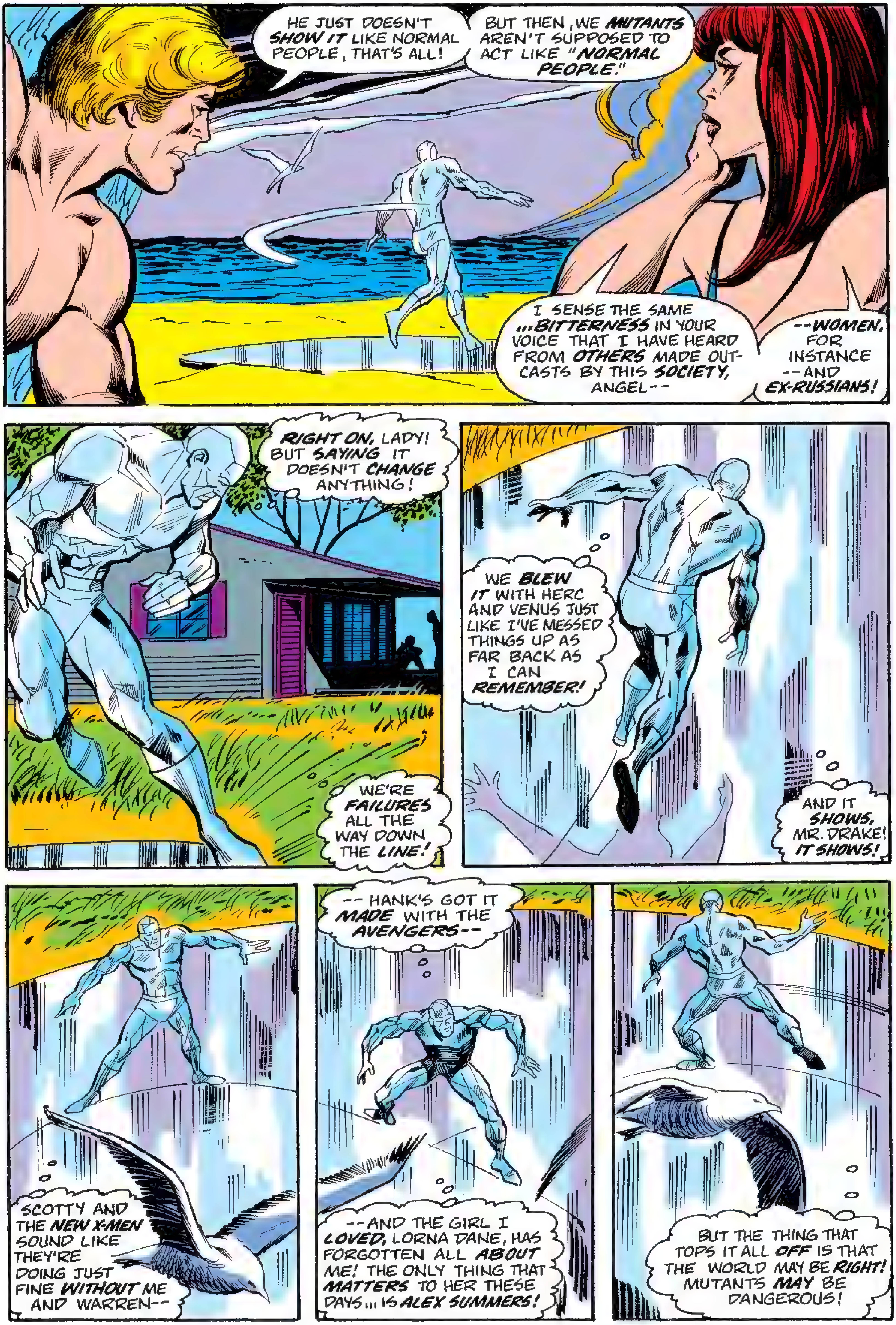
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

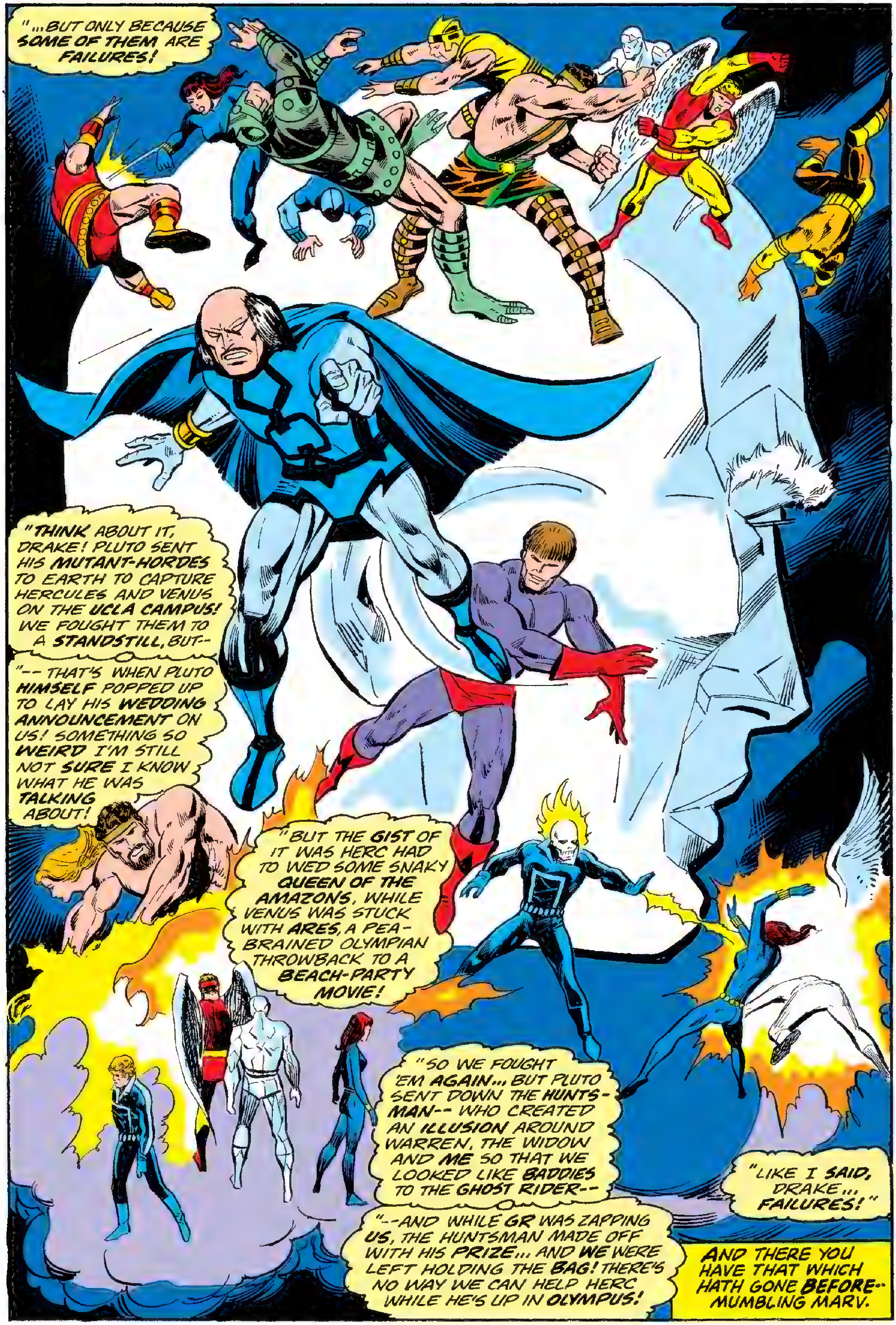
THE CHAMPIONS™

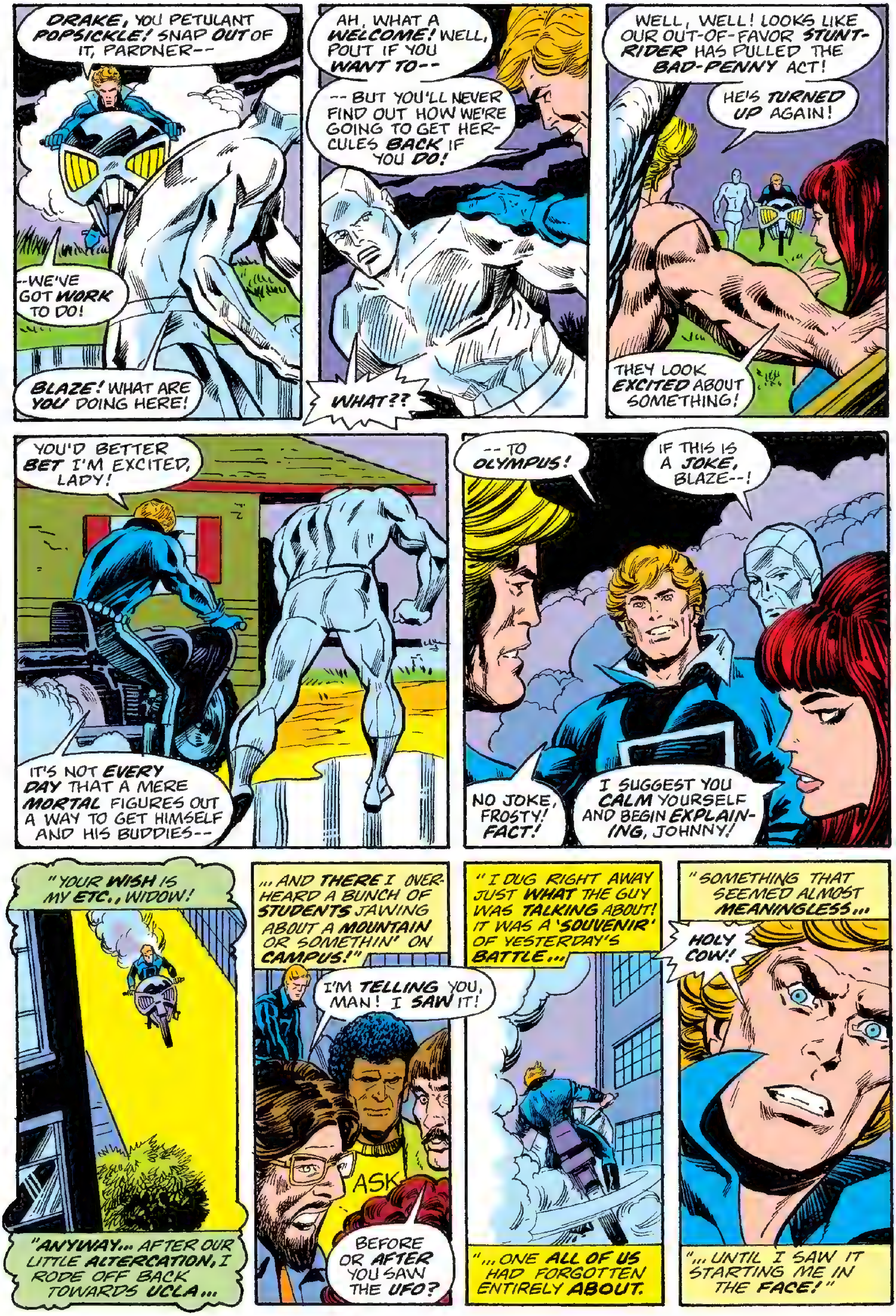
Plot TONY ISABELLA / Script BILL MANTLO / Pencils GEORGE TUSKA / Inks VINCE COLLETTA / Letters KAREN MANTLO / Colors GEORGE ROUSSOS / Editor MARV WOLFMAN

ASSAULT ON OLYMPUS

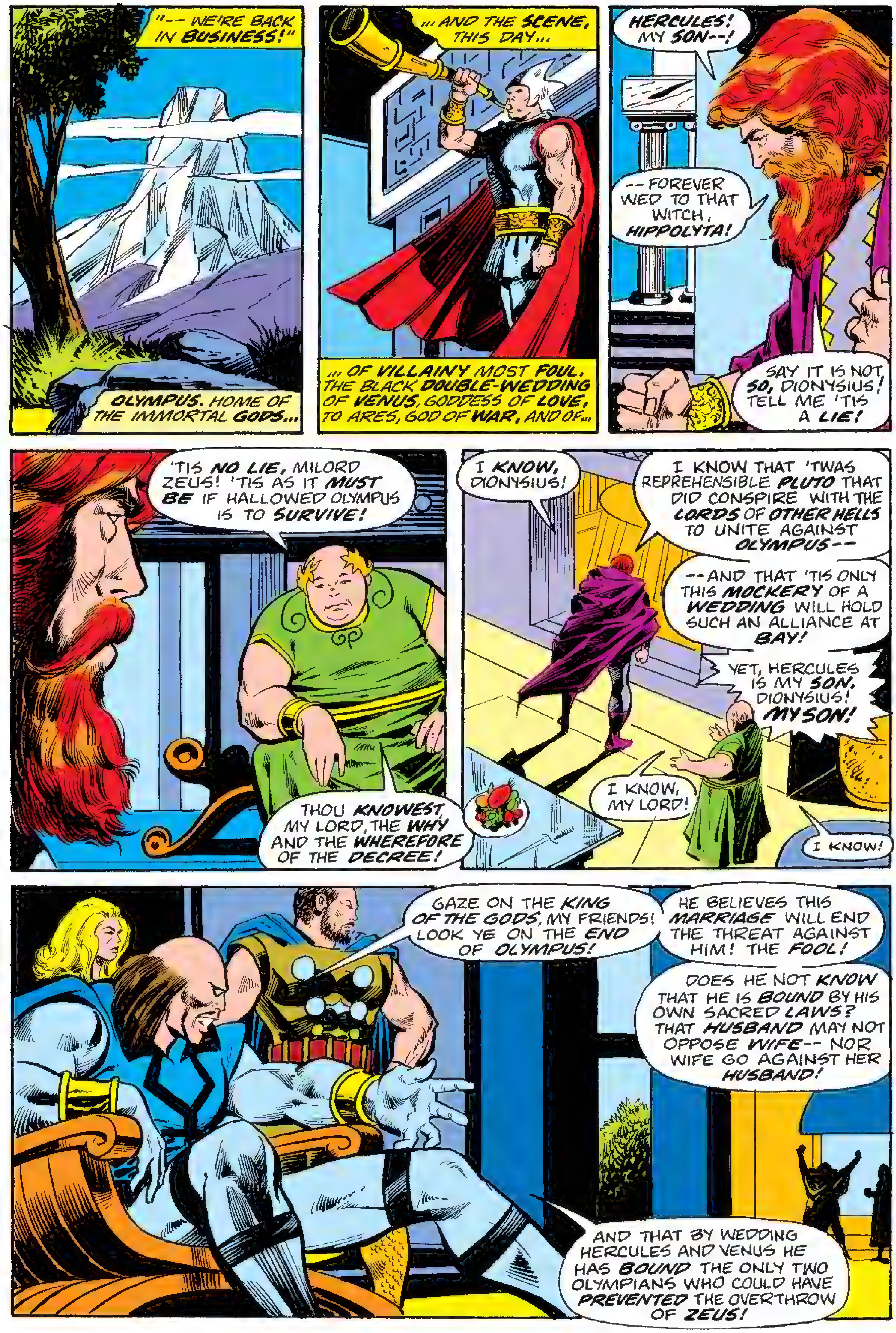

IT WOULD SEEM THAT FRIEND ICEMAN TAKES HIS DEFEATS IN STRIDE, ANGEL!
ONE WOULD THINK THAT THE LOSS OF HERCULES AND VENUS TO THE HUNTSMAN* COULD NOT BE SWALLOWED SO EASILY!
DON'T LET BOBBY'S GAMES FOOL YOU, WIDOW! HE'S JUST AS SICK ABOUT WHAT WENT DOWN AS WE ARE!
MAYBE MORE!
* Whew! CAPSULE-CONDENSATION OF LAST ISH -- marv

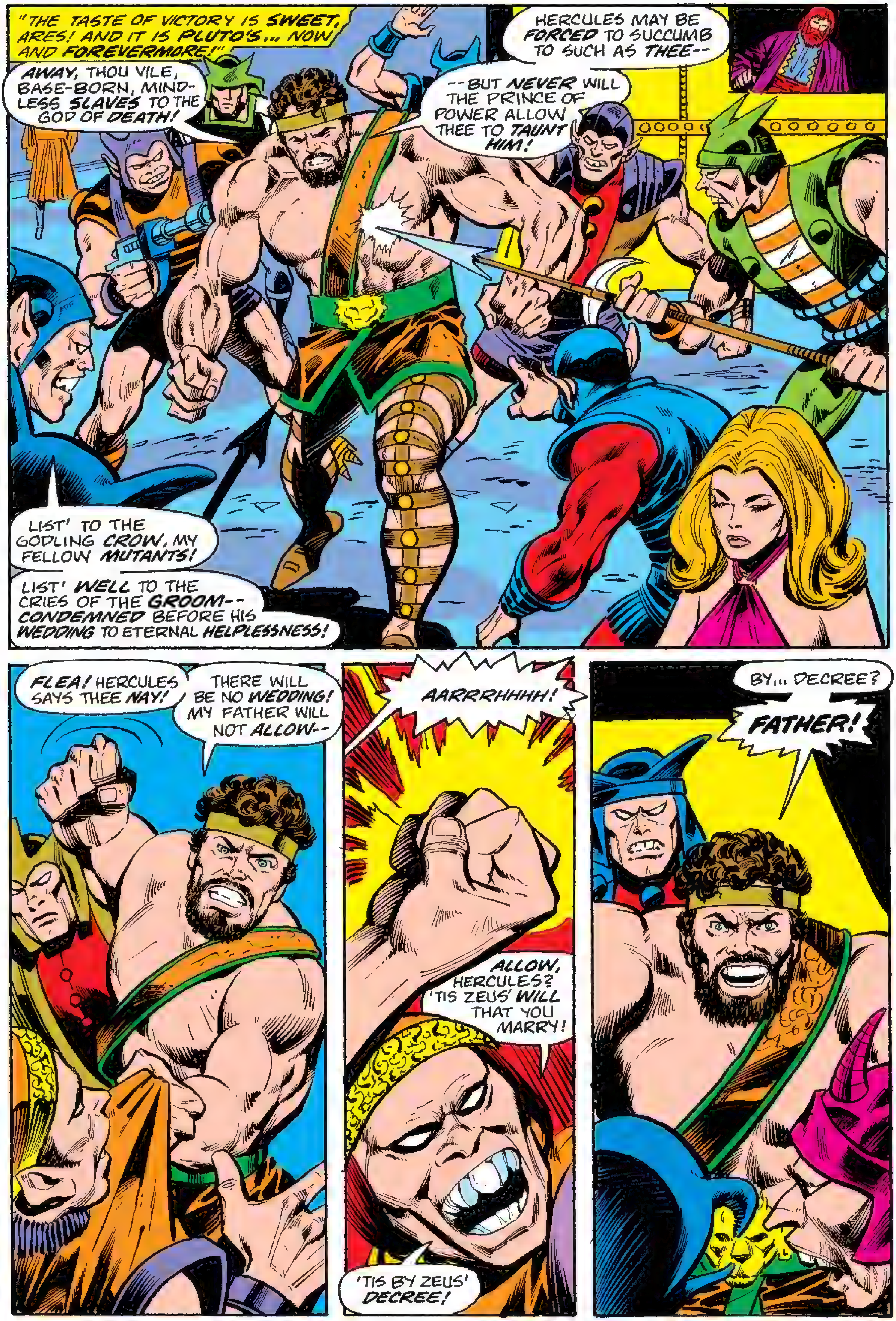

HE JUST DOESN'T SHOW IT LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE, THAT'S ALL!
BUT THEN, WE MUTANTS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO ACT LIKE "NORMAL PEOPLE."
I SENSE THE SAME ...BITTERNESS IN YOUR VOICE THAT I HAVE HEARD FROM OTHERS MADE OUTCASTS BY THIS SOCIETY, ANGEL--
--WOMEN, FOR INSTANCE --AND EX-RUSSIANS!
RIGHT ON, LADY! BUT SAYING IT DOESN'T CHANGE ANYTHING!
WE'RE FAILURES ALL THE WAY DOWN THE LINE!
WE BLEW IT WITH HERC AND VENUS JUST LIKE I'VE MESSED THINGS UP AS FAR BACK AS I CAN REMEMBER!
AND IT SHOWS, MR. DRAKE! IT SHOWS!
SCOTTY AND THE NEW X-MEN SOUND LIKE THEY'RE DOING JUST FINE WITHOUT ME AND WARREN--
--HANK'S GOT IT MADE WITH THE AVENGERS--
--AND THE GIRL I LOVED, LORNA DANE, HAS FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT ME! THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS TO HER THESE DAYS... IS ALEX SUMMERS!
BUT THE THING THAT TOPS IT ALL OFF IS THAT THE WORLD MAY BE RIGHT! MUTANTS MAY BE DANGEROUS!

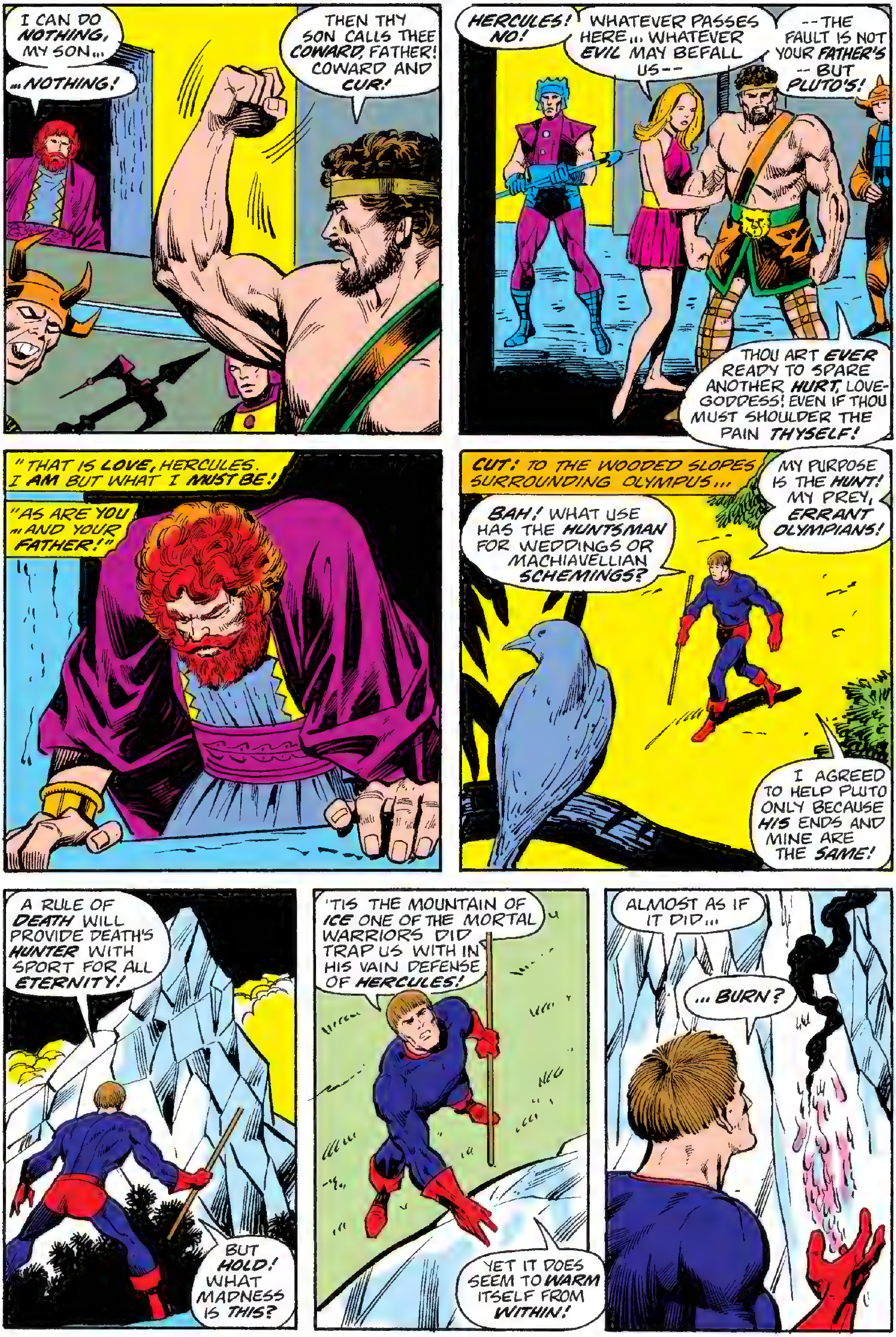

"...BUT ONLY BECAUSE SOME OF THEM ARE FAILURES!
"THINK ABOUT IT, DRAKE! PLUTO SENT HIS MUTANT-HORDES TO EARTH TO CAPTURE HERCULES AND VENUS ON THE UCLA CAMPUS! WE FOUGHT THEM TO A STANDSTILL, BUT--
"--THAT'S WHEN PLUTO HIMSELF POPPED UP TO LAY HIS WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT ON US! SOMETHING SO WEIRD I'M STILL NOT SURE I KNOW WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT!
"BUT THE GIST OF IT WAS HERC HAD TO WED SOME SNAKY QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS, WHILE VENUS WAS STUCK WITH ARES, A PEA-BRAINED OLYMPIAN THROWBACK TO A BEACH-PARTY MOVIE!
"SO WE FOUGHT 'EM AGAIN... BUT PLUTO SENT DOWN THE HUNTSMAN-- WHO CREATED AN ILLUSION AROUND WARREN, THE WIDOW AND ME SO THAT WE LOOKED LIKE BADDIES TO THE GHOST RIDER--
"--AND WHILE GR WAS ZAPPING US, THE HUNTSMAN MADE OFF WITH HIS PRIZE... AND WE WERE LEFT HOLDING THE BAG! THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN HELP HERC WHILE HE'S UP IN OLYMPUS!
"LIKE I SAID, DRAKE... FAILURES!"
AND THERE YOU HAVE THAT WHICH HATH GONE BEFORE-- MUMBLING MARV.

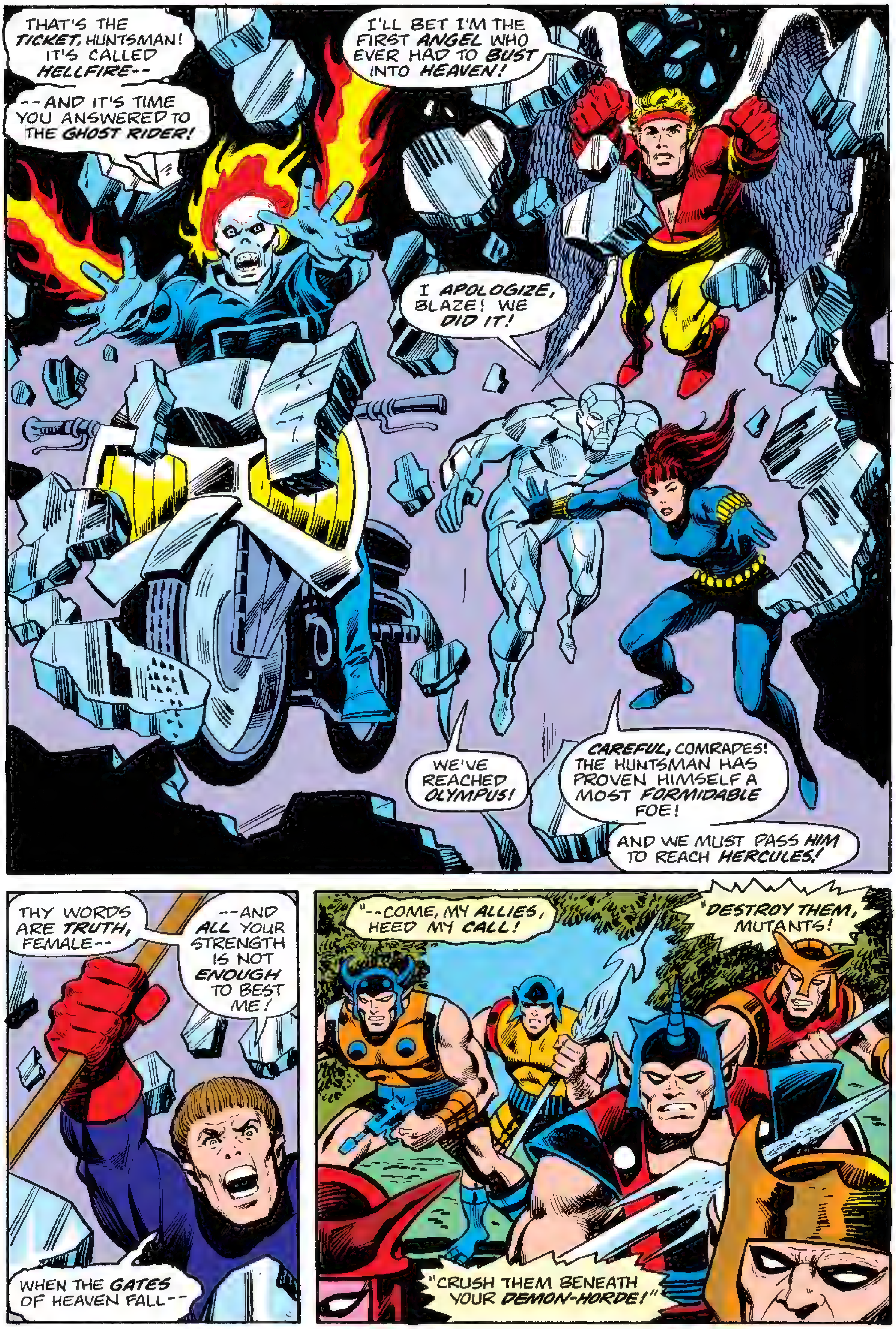

DRAKE, YOU PETULANT POPSICKLE! SNAP OUT OF IT, PARDNER--
--WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO!
BLAZE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!
AH, WHAT A WELCOME! WELL, POUT IF YOU WANT TO--
-- BUT YOU'LL NEVER FIND OUT HOW WE'RE GOING TO GET HERCULES BACK IF YOU DO!
WHAT??
WELL, WELL! LOOKS LIKE OUR OUT-OF-FAVOR STUNT-RIDER HAS PULLED THE BAD-PENNY ACT!
HE'S TURNED UP AGAIN!
THEY LOOK EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING!
YOU'D BETTER BET I'M EXCITED, LADY!
IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT A MERE MORTAL FIGURES OUT A WAY TO GET HIMSELF AND HIS BUDDIES--
-- TO OLYMPUS!
IF THIS IS A JOKE, BLAZE--!
NO JOKE, FROSTY! FACT!
I SUGGEST YOU CALM YOURSELF AND BEGIN EXPLAINING, JOHNNY!
"YOUR WISH IS MY ETC., WIDOW!
"ANYWAY... AFTER OUR LITTLE ALTERCATION, I RODE OFF BACK TOWARDS UCLA...
... AND THERE I OVERHEARD A BUNCH OF STUDENTS JAWING ABOUT A MOUNTAIN OR SOMETHIN' ON CAMPUS!"
I'M TELLING YOU, MAN! I SAW IT!
ASK
BEFORE OR AFTER YOU SAW THE UFO?
"I DUG RIGHT AWAY JUST WHAT THE GUY WAS TALKING ABOUT! IT WAS A 'SOUVENIR' OF YESTERDAY'S BATTLE...
"... ONE ALL OF US HAD FORGOTTEN ENTIRELY ABOUT.
"SOMETHING THAT SEEMED ALMOST MEANINGLESS...
HOLY COW!
"... UNTIL I SAW IT STARTING ME IN THE FACE!"

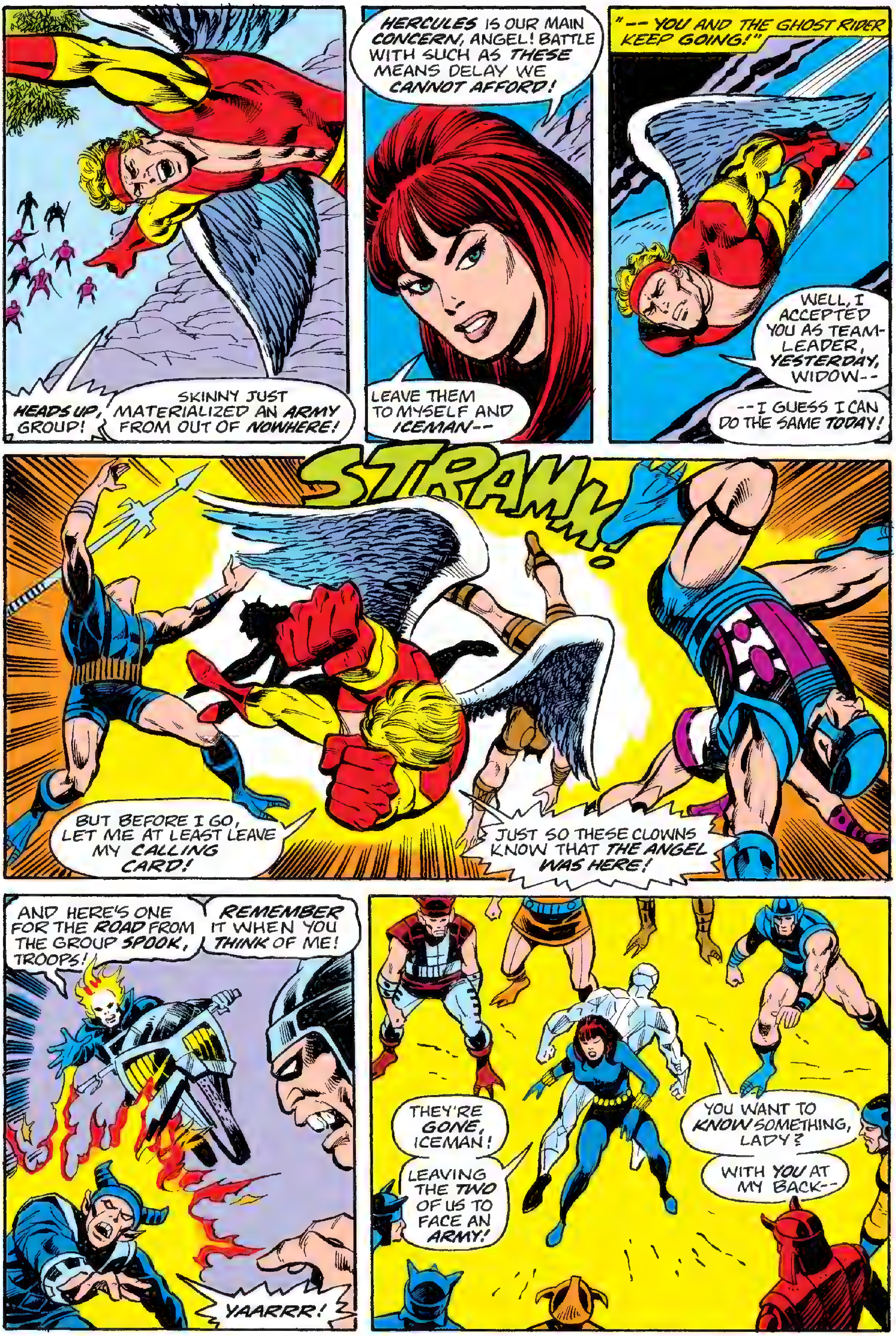
THE MOUNTAIN!
ICEMAN'S MOUNTAIN!!
"AND THERE IT WAS! BIG AND HARD AND FROZEN AS EVER! THE ONE DRAKE FORMED TO PREVENT PLUTO FROM FOLLOWING AFTER US WHILE WE LUGGED AN UNCONSCIOUS HERC AND VENUS OUT OF HARM'S WAY!"
NOW DO YOU GET WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT?
SURE WE DO, PAL! YOU'RE SICK!
IT WAS A POOR JOKE, JOHNNY!
"A SICK JOKE, YOU MEAN! SO I PILED UP A LOT OF ICE OVER THE PORTAL THAT PLUTO AND THE OLYMPIANS USED TO REACH EARTH AND THE ICE HASN'T MELTED YET...
"...SO WHAT?"
WAIT! DON'T YOU SEE, BOBBY!
SEE WHAT?
ALL THE OTHER PORTALS TO OLYMPUS WERE CLOSED BY THE OLYMPIANS--BEHIND THEM, BEFORE WE COULD GET THROUGH!
BUT NOT THIS ONE! YOUR MOUNTAIN BLOCKED PLUTO FROM CLOSING IT! IT'S STILL THERE!
WHICH MEANS WE'VE GOT A WAY TO FOLLOW THEM AND RESCUE HERCULES!
KICK ME, SOMEBODY! KICK ME!
LATER, BOBBY, RIGHT NOW--

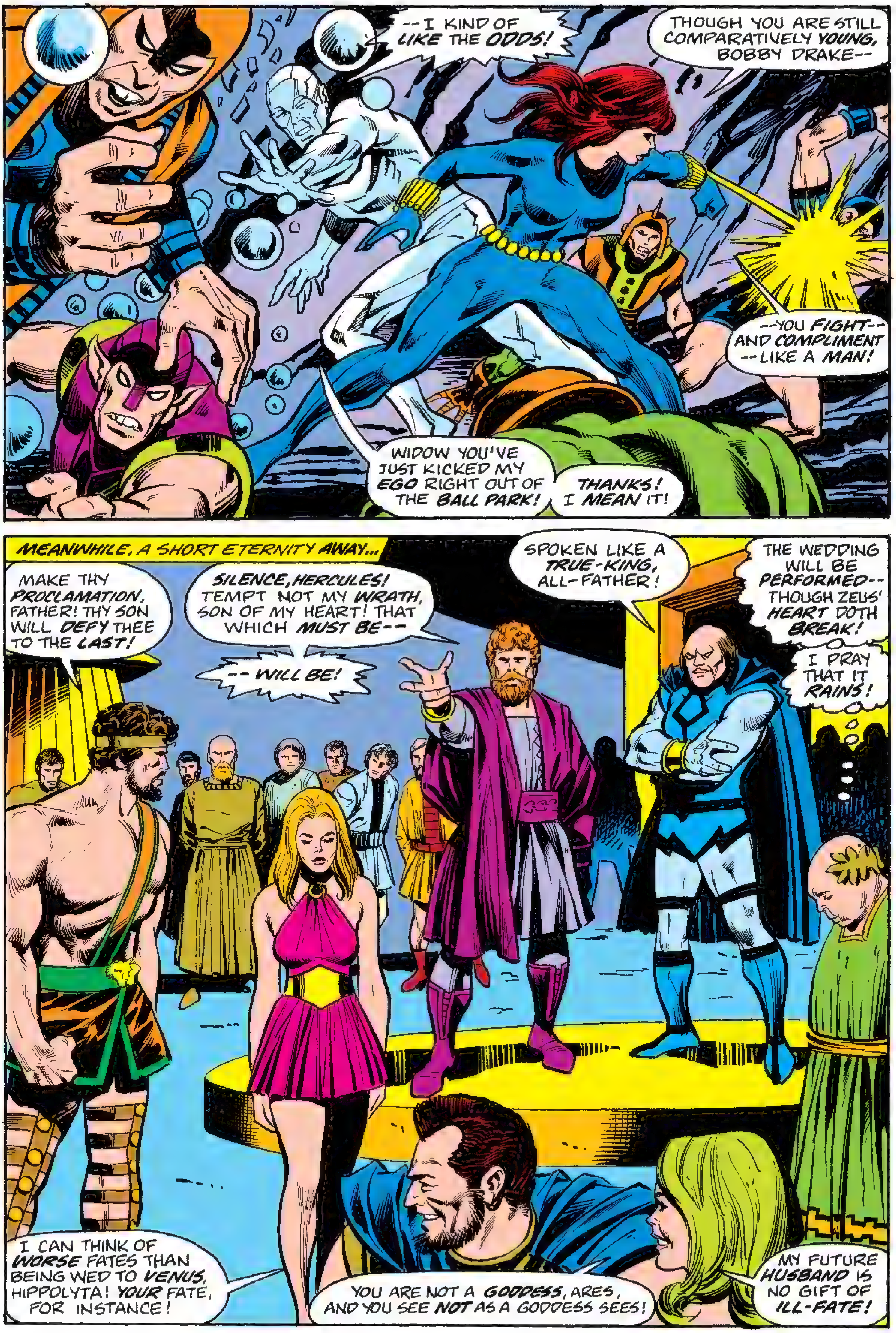

"-- WE'RE BACK IN BUSINESS!"
OLYMPUS. HOME OF THE IMMORTAL GODS...
...AND THE SCENE, THIS DAY...
...OF VILLAINY MOST FOUL. THE BLACK DOUBLE-WEDDING OF VENUS, GODDESS OF LOVE, TO ARES, GOD OF WAR, AND OF...
HERCULES! MY SON--!
--FOREVER WED TO THAT WITCH, HIPPOLYTA!
SAY IT IS NOT SO, DIONYSIUS! TELL ME 'TIS A LIE!
'TIS NO LIE, MILORD ZEUS! 'TIS AS IT MUST BE IF HALLOWED OLYMPUS IS TO SURVIVE!
THOU KNOWEST, MY LORD, THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE OF THE DECREE!
I KNOW, DIONYSIUS!
I KNOW THAT 'TWAS REPREHENSIBLE PLUTO THAT DID CONSPIRE WITH THE LORDS OF OTHER HELLS TO UNITE AGAINST OLYMPUS--
--AND THAT 'TIS ONLY THIS MOCKERY OF A WEDDING WILL HOLD SUCH AN ALLIANCE AT BAY!
YET, HERCULES IS MY SON, DIONYSIUS! MY SON!
I KNOW, MY LORD!
I KNOW!
GAZE ON THE KING OF THE GODS, MY FRIENDS! LOOK YE ON THE END OF OLYMPUS!
HE BELIEVES THIS MARRIAGE WILL END THE THREAT AGAINST HIM! THE FOOL!
DOES HE NOT KNOW THAT HE IS BOUND BY HIS OWN SACRED LAWS? THAT HUSBAND MAY NOT OPPOSE WIFE-- NOR WIFE GO AGAINST HER HUSBAND!
AND THAT BY WEDDING HERCULES AND VENUS HE HAS BOUND THE ONLY TWO OLYMPIANS WHO COULD HAVE PREVENTED THE OVERTHROW OF ZEUS!

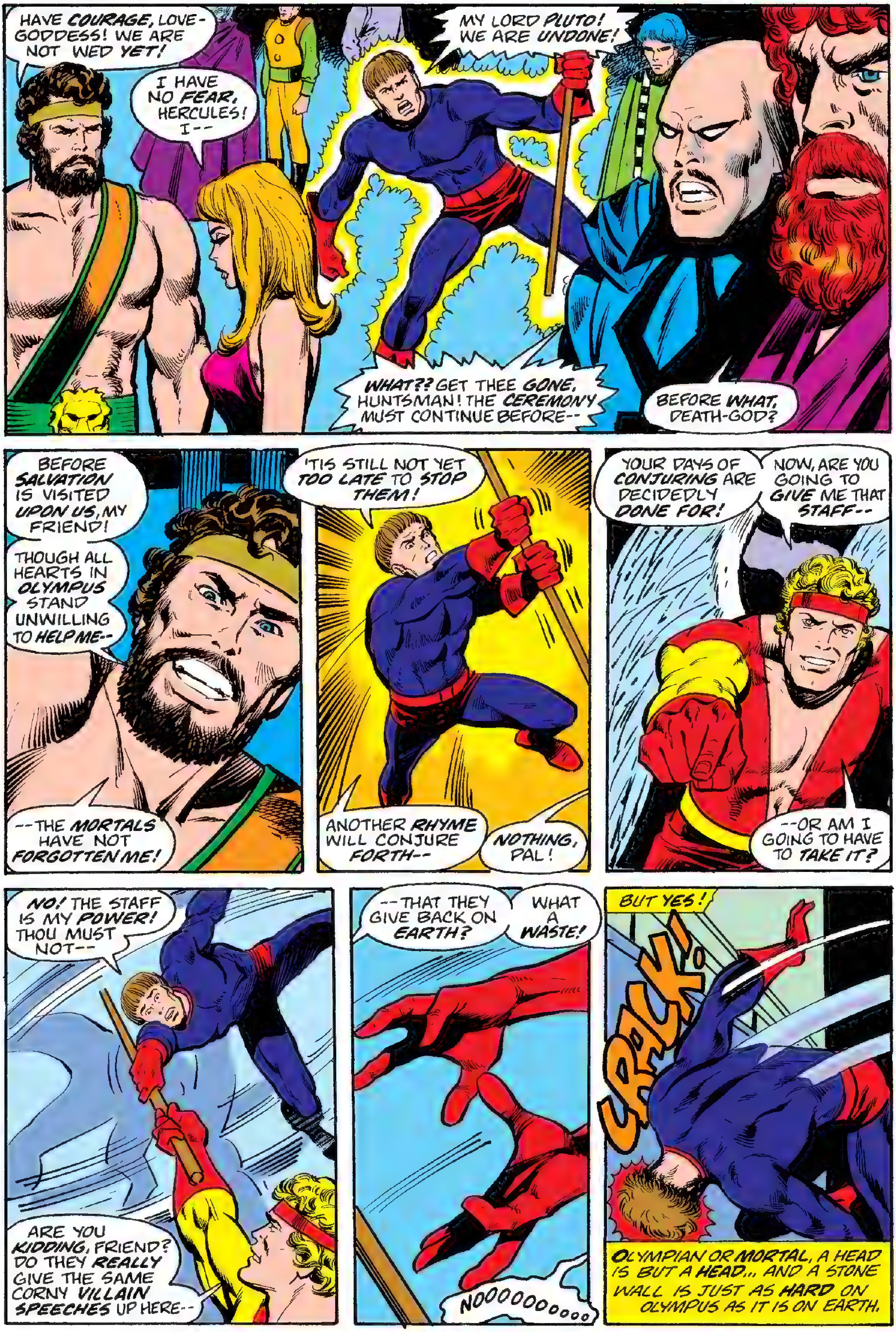

"THE TASTE OF VICTORY IS SWEET, ARES! AND IT IS PLUTO'S... NOW AND FOREVERMORE!"
AWAY, THOU VILE, BASE-BORN, MINDLESS SLAVES TO THE GOD OF DEATH!
HERCULES MAY BE FORCED TO SUCCUMB TO SUCH AS THEE--
--BUT NEVER WILL THE PRINCE OF POWER ALLOW THEE TO TAUNT HIM!
LIST' TO THE GODLING CROW, MY FELLOW MUTANTS!
LIST' WELL TO THE CRIES OF THE GROOM-- CONDEMNED BEFORE HIS WEDDING TO ETERNAL HELPLESSNESS!
FLEA! HERCULES SAYS THEE NAY!
THERE WILL BE NO WEDDING! MY FATHER WILL NOT ALLOW--
AARRRHHHH!
ALLOW, HERCULES? 'TIS ZEUS' WILL THAT YOU MARRY!
'TIS BY ZEUS' DECREE!
BY... DECREE?
FATHER!

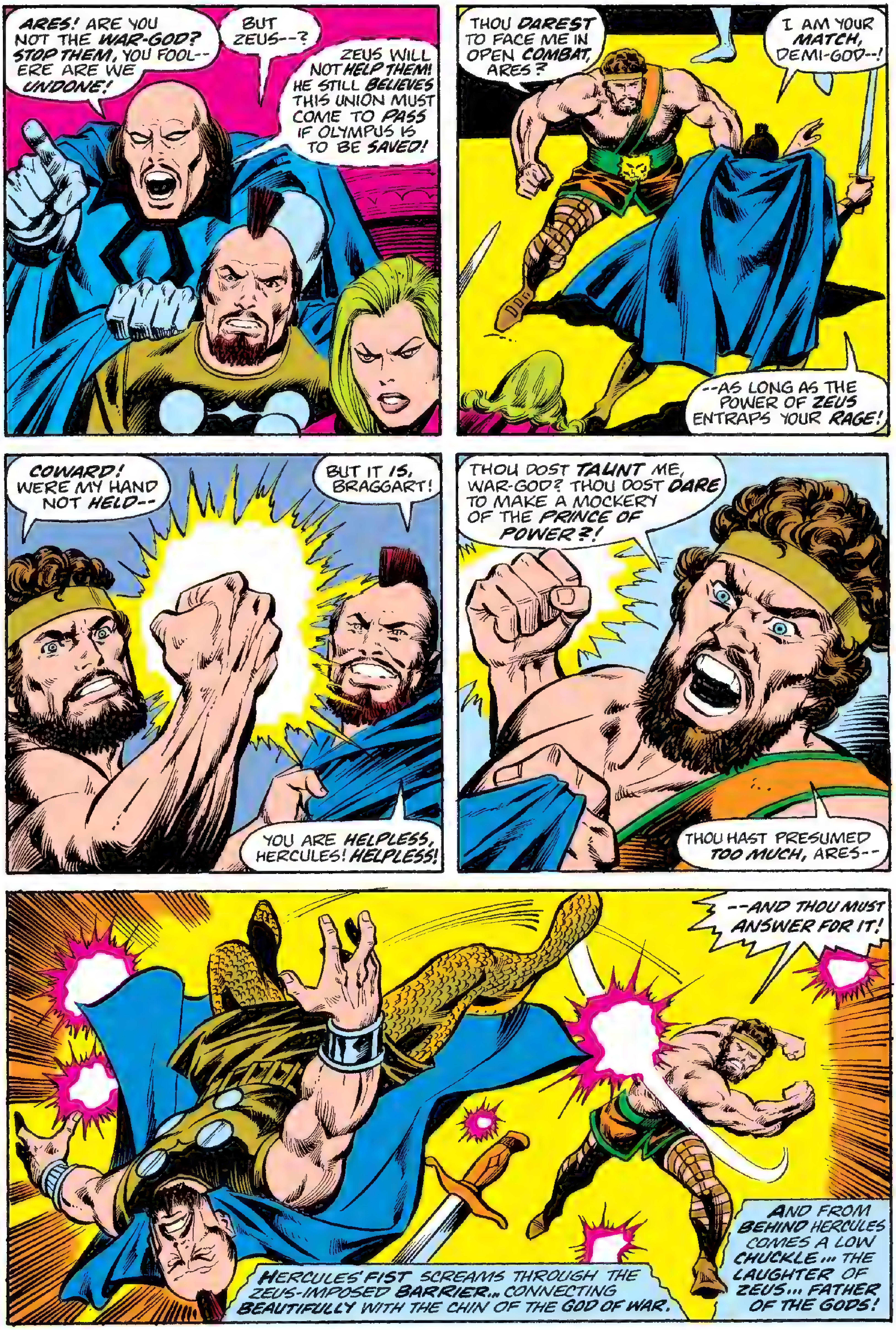

I CAN DO NOTHING, MY SON...
...NOTHING!
THEN THY SON CALLS THEE COWARD, FATHER! COWARD AND CUR!
HERCULES! NO!
WHATEVER PASSES HERE... WHATEVER EVIL MAY BEFALL US--
--THE FAULT IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S --BUT PLUTO'S!
THOU ART EVER READY TO SPARE ANOTHER HURT, LOVE-GODDESS! EVEN IF THOU MUST SHOULDER THE PAIN THYSELF!
"THAT IS LOVE, HERCULES. I AM BUT WHAT I MUST BE!
"AS ARE YOU ...AND YOUR FATHER!"
CUT: TO THE WOODED SLOPES SURROUNDING OLYMPUS...
MY PURPOSE IS THE HUNT! MY PREY, ERRANT OLYMPIANS!
BAH! WHAT USE HAS THE HUNTSMAN FOR WEDDINGS OR MACHIAVELLIAN SCHEMINGS?
I AGREED TO HELP PLUTO ONLY BECAUSE HIS ENDS AND MINE ARE THE SAME!
A RULE OF DEATH WILL PROVIDE DEATH'S HUNTER WITH SPORT FOR ALL ETERNITY!
BUT HOLD! WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?
'TIS THE MOUNTAIN OF ICE ONE OF THE MORTAL WARRIORS DID TRAP US WITH IN HIS VAIN DEFENSE OF HERCULES!
YET IT DOES SEEM TO WARM ITSELF FROM WITHIN!
ALMOST AS IF IT DID...
...BURN?

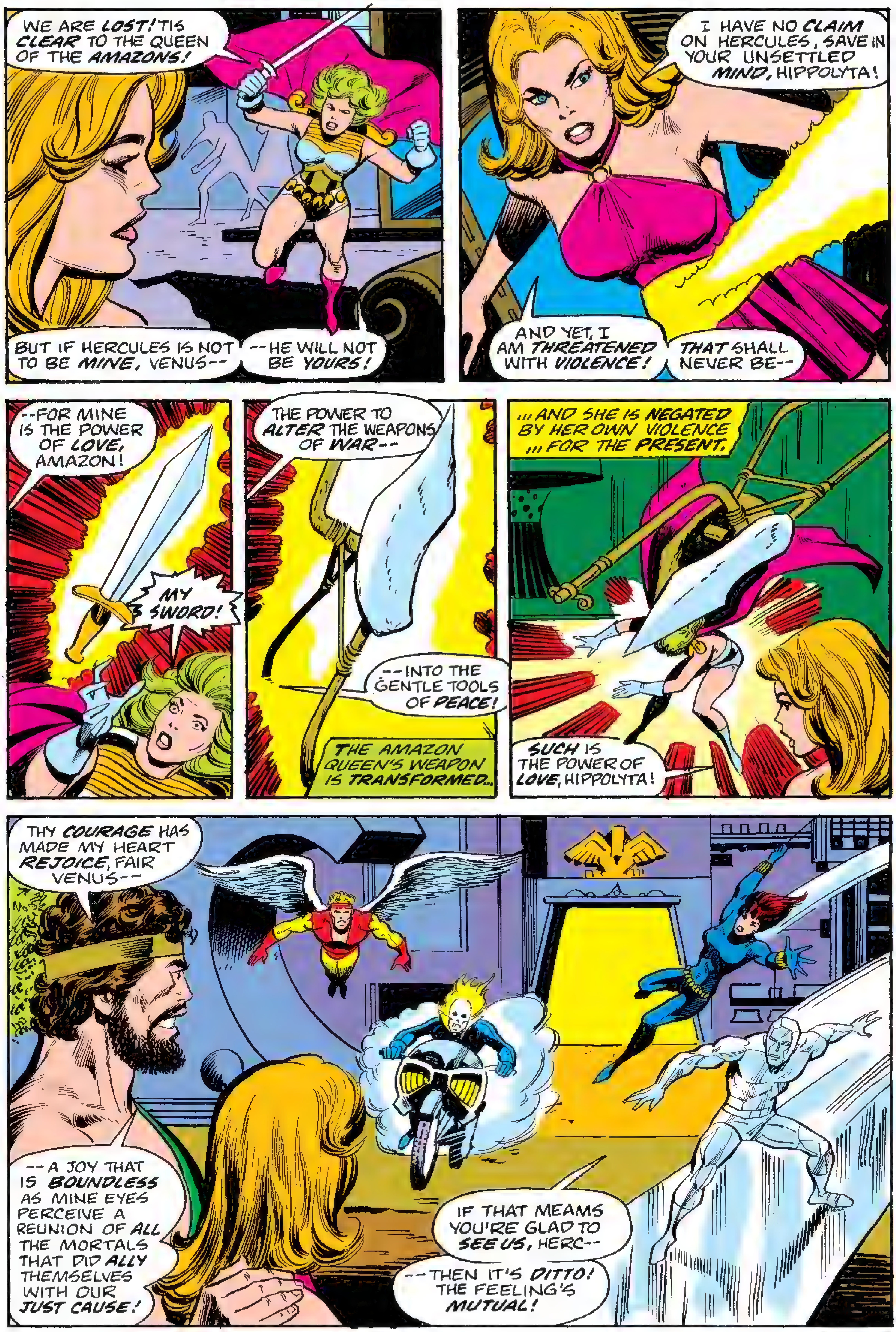

THAT'S THE *TICKET,* HUNTSMAN! IT'S CALLED *HELLFIRE--*
--AND IT'S TIME YOU ANSWERED TO THE *GHOST RIDER!*
I'LL BET I'M THE FIRST *ANGEL* WHO EVER HAD TO *BUST* INTO *HEAVEN!*
I *APOLOGIZE,* BLAZE! WE *DID IT!*
WE'VE REACHED *OLYMPUS!*
CAREFUL, COMRADES! THE HUNTSMAN HAS PROVEN HIMSELF A MOST *FORMIDABLE* FOE!
AND WE MUST PASS *HIM* TO REACH *HERCULES!*
THY WORDS ARE *TRUTH,* FEMALE--
--AND *ALL* YOUR STRENGTH IS NOT *ENOUGH* TO BEST ME!
WHEN THE *GATES* OF HEAVEN FALL--
"--COME, MY *ALLIES,* HEED MY *CALL!*
"*DESTROY THEM,* MUTANTS!
"CRUSH THEM BENEATH YOUR *DEMON-HORDE!*"

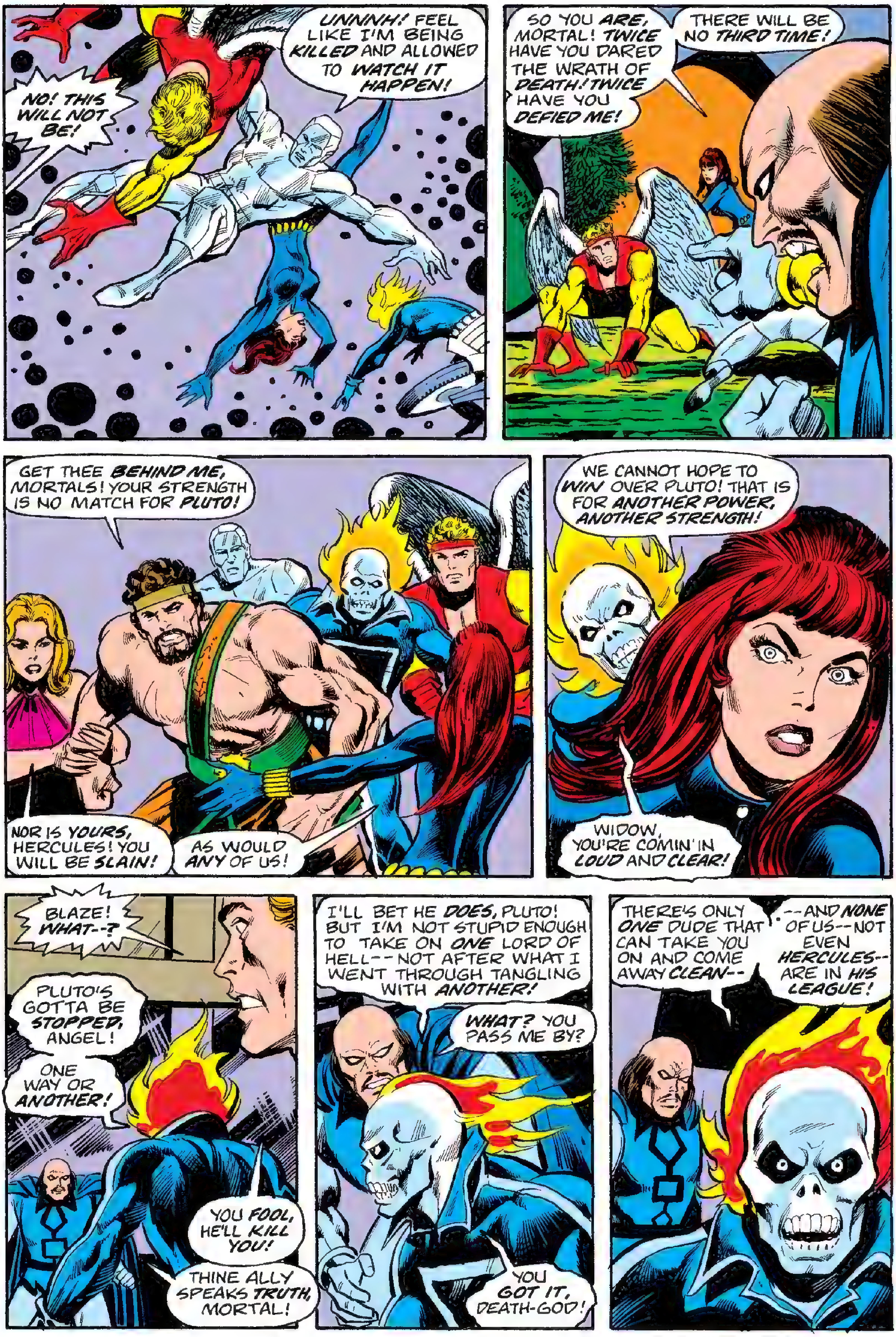

HEADS UP, GROUP!
SKINNY JUST MATERIALIZED AN ARMY FROM OUT OF NOWHERE!
HERCULES IS OUR MAIN CONCERN, ANGEL! BATTLE WITH SUCH AS THESE MEANS DELAY WE CANNOT AFFORD!
LEAVE THEM TO MYSELF AND ICEMAN--
"--YOU AND THE GHOST RIDER KEEP GOING!"
WELL, I ACCEPTED YOU AS TEAM-LEADER, YESTERDAY, WIDOW--
--I GUESS I CAN DO THE SAME TODAY!
STRAMM!
BUT BEFORE I GO, LET ME AT LEAST LEAVE MY CALLING CARD!
JUST SO THESE CLOWNS KNOW THAT THE ANGEL WAS HERE!
AND HERE'S ONE FOR THE ROAD FROM THE GROUP SPOOK, TROOPS!
REMEMBER IT WHEN YOU THINK OF ME!
YAARRR!
THEY'RE GONE, ICEMAN!
LEAVING THE TWO OF US TO FACE AN ARMY!
YOU WANT TO KNOW SOMETHING, LADY?
WITH YOU AT MY BACK--

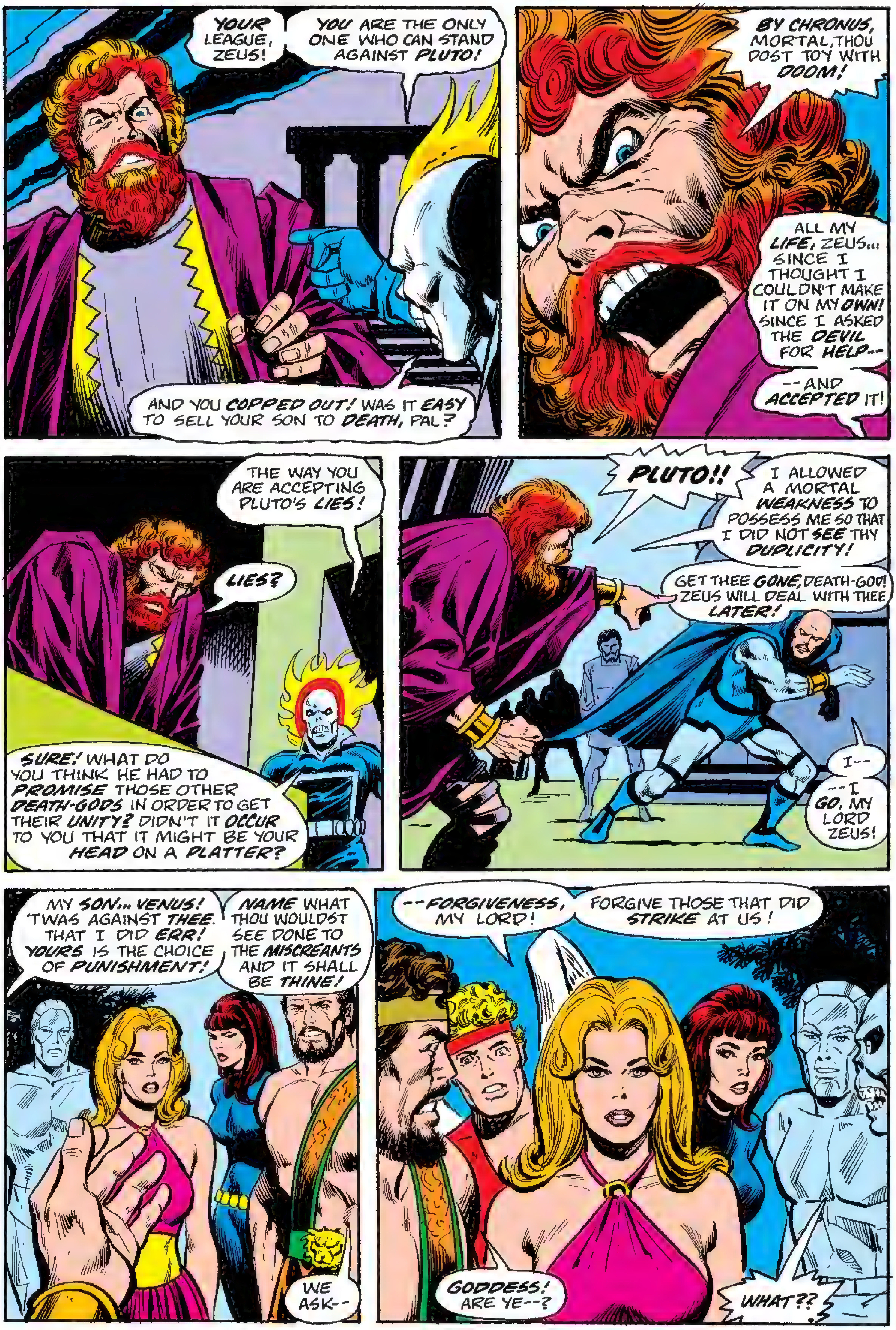

--I KIND OF *LIKE* THE *ODDS!*
THOUGH YOU ARE STILL COMPARATIVELY *YOUNG,* BOBBY DRAKE--
--YOU *FIGHT*-- AND *COMPLIMENT* --LIKE A *MAN!*
WIDOW YOU'VE JUST KICKED MY *EGO* RIGHT OUT OF THE *BALL PARK!*
THANKS! I *MEAN* IT!
MEANWHILE, A SHORT ETERNITY AWAY...
MAKE THY *PROCLAMATION,* FATHER! THY SON WILL *DEFY* THEE TO THE *LAST!*
SILENCE, HERCULES! TEMPT NOT MY *WRATH,* SON OF MY HEART! THAT WHICH *MUST BE*--
--*WILL BE!*
SPOKEN LIKE A *TRUE-KING,* ALL-FATHER!
THE WEDDING WILL BE *PERFORMED*-- THOUGH ZEUS' *HEART* DOTH *BREAK!*
I PRAY THAT IT *RAINS!*
I CAN THINK OF *WORSE* FATES THAN BEING WED TO *VENUS,* HIPPOLYTA! *YOUR* FATE, FOR INSTANCE!
YOU ARE NOT A *GODDESS,* ARES, AND YOU SEE *NOT* AS A GODDESS SEES!
MY FUTURE *HUSBAND* IS NO GIFT OF *ILL-FATE!*

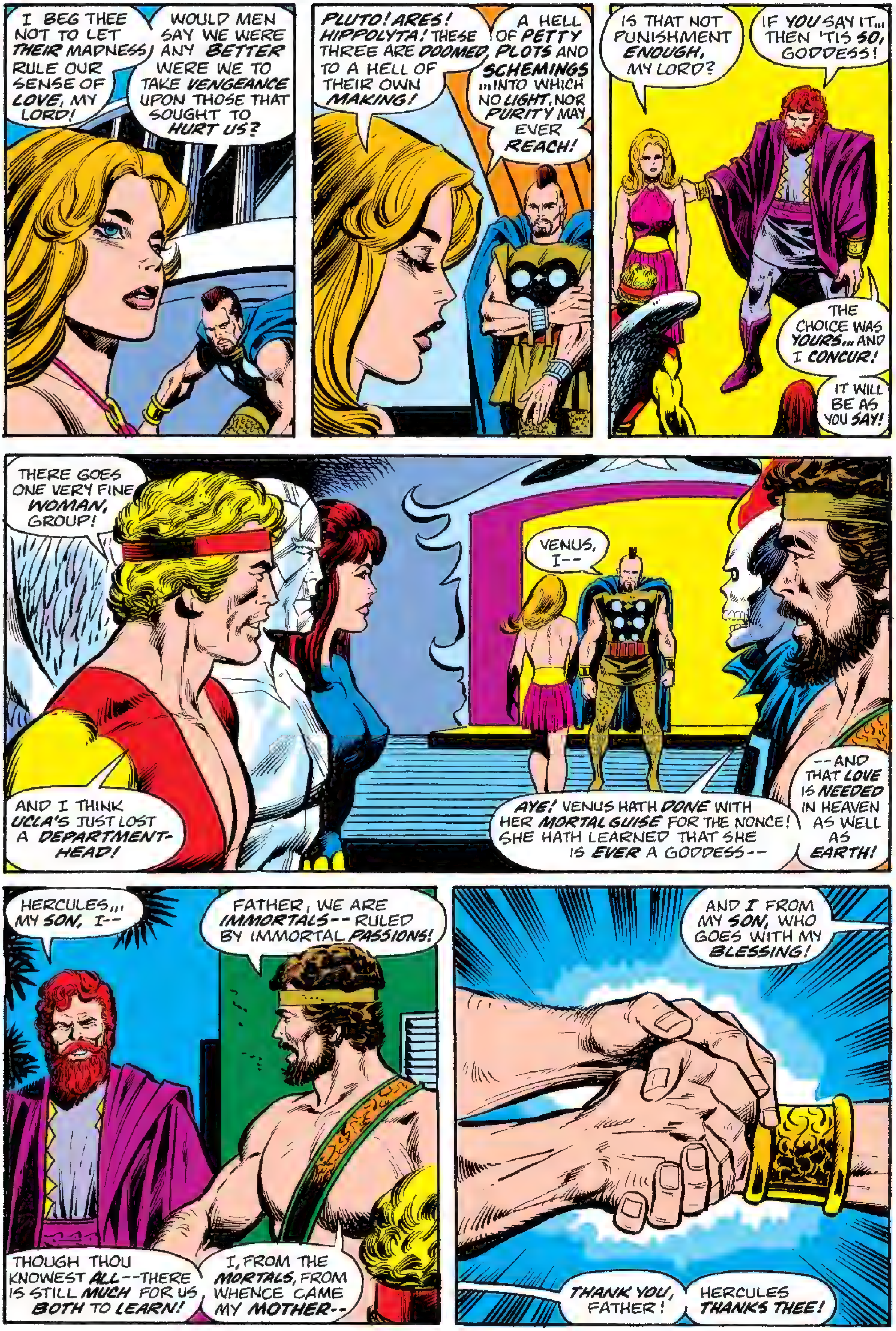

HAVE COURAGE, LOVE-GODDESS! WE ARE NOT WED YET!
I HAVE NO FEAR, HERCULES! I--
MY LORD PLUTO! WE ARE UNDONE!
WHAT?? GET THEE GONE, HUNTSMAN! THE CEREMONY MUST CONTINUE BEFORE--
BEFORE WHAT, DEATH-GOD?
BEFORE SALVATION IS VISITED UPON US, MY FRIEND!
THOUGH ALL HEARTS IN OLYMPUS STAND UNWILLING TO HELP ME--
--THE MORTALS HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN ME!
'TIS STILL NOT YET TOO LATE TO STOP THEM!
ANOTHER RHYME WILL CONJURE FORTH--
NOTHING, PAL!
YOUR DAYS OF CONJURING ARE DECIDEDLY DONE FOR!
NOW, ARE YOU GOING TO GIVE ME THAT STAFF--
--OR AM I GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE IT?
NO! THE STAFF IS MY POWER! THOU MUST NOT--
ARE YOU KIDDING, FRIEND? DO THEY REALLY GIVE THE SAME CORNY VILLAIN SPEECHES UP HERE--
--THAT THEY GIVE BACK ON EARTH?
WHAT A WASTE!
NOOOOOOOoooo
BUT YES!
CRACK!
OLYMPIAN OR MORTAL, A HEAD IS BUT A HEAD... AND A STONE WALL IS JUST AS HARD ON OLYMPUS AS IT IS ON EARTH.

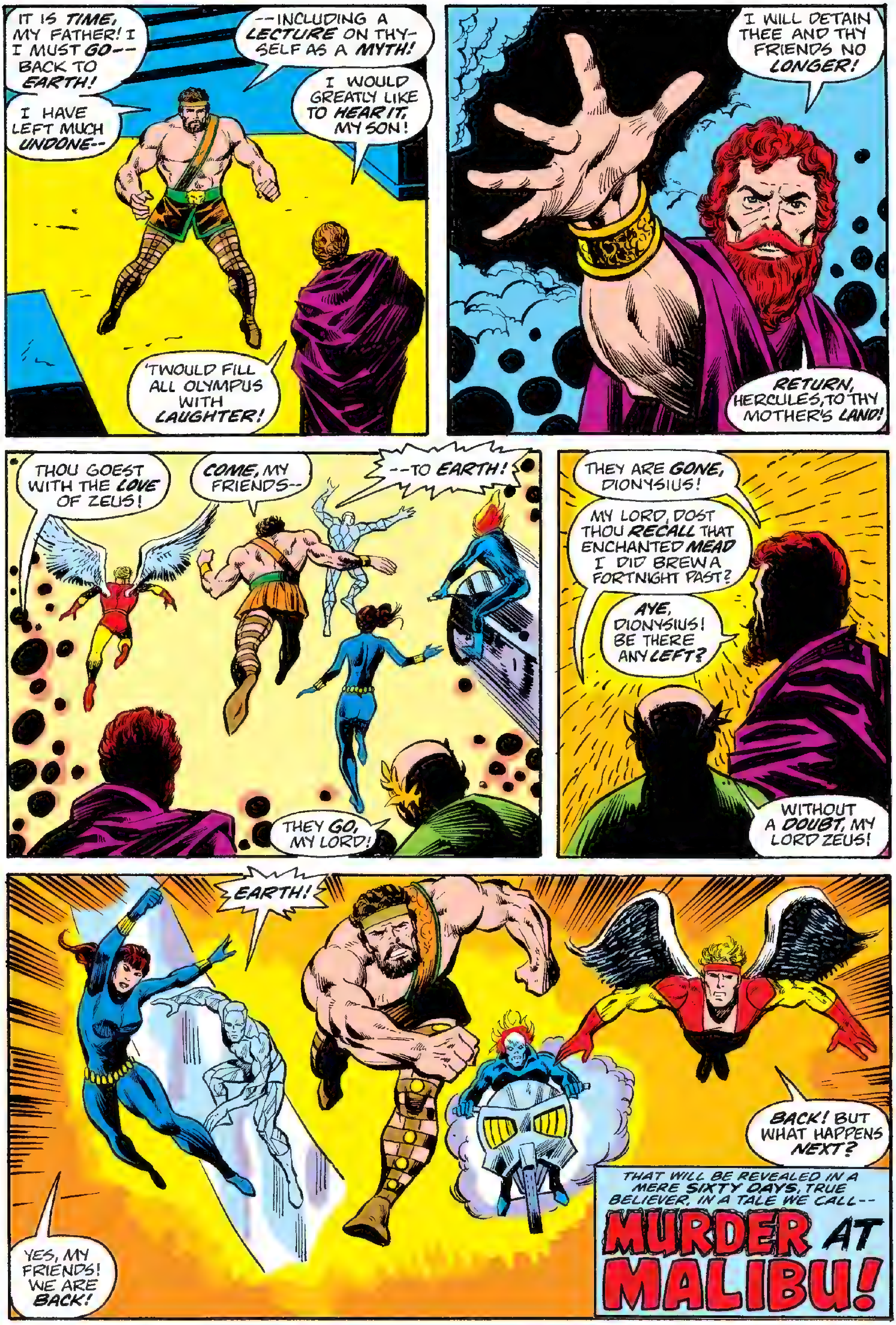

ARES! ARE YOU NOT THE WAR-GOD? STOP THEM, YOU FOOL-- ERE ARE WE UNDONE!
BUT ZEUS--?
ZEUS WILL NOT HELP THEM! HE STILL BELIEVES THIS UNION MUST COME TO PASS IF OLYMPUS IS TO BE SAVED!
THOU DAREST TO FACE ME IN OPEN COMBAT, ARES?
I AM YOUR MATCH, DEMI-GOD--!
--AS LONG AS THE POWER OF ZEUS ENTRAPS YOUR RAGE!
COWARD! WERE MY HAND NOT HELD--
BUT IT IS, BRAGGART!
YOU ARE HELPLESS, HERCULES! HELPLESS!
THOU DOST TAUNT ME, WAR-GOD? THOU DOST DARE TO MAKE A MOCKERY OF THE PRINCE OF POWER?!
THOU HAST PRESUMED TOO MUCH, ARES--
--AND THOU MUST ANSWER FOR IT!
HERCULES' FIST SCREAMS THROUGH THE ZEUS-IMPOSED BARRIER... CONNECTING BEAUTIFULLY WITH THE CHIN OF THE GOD OF WAR.
AND FROM BEHIND HERCULES COMES A LOW CHUCKLE... THE LAUGHTER OF ZEUS... FATHER OF THE GODS!


WE ARE *LOST!* 'TIS *CLEAR* TO THE QUEEN OF THE *AMAZONS!*
BUT IF HERCULES IS NOT TO BE *MINE,* VENUS--
--HE WILL NOT BE *YOURS!*
I HAVE NO *CLAIM* ON HERCULES, SAVE IN YOUR UNSETTLED *MIND,* HIPPOLYTA!
AND YET, I AM *THREATENED* WITH *VIOLENCE!*
THAT SHALL NEVER BE--
--FOR MINE IS THE POWER OF *LOVE,* AMAZON!
MY SWORD!
THE POWER TO *ALTER* THE WEAPONS OF *WAR*--
--INTO THE GENTLE TOOLS OF *PEACE!*
THE AMAZON QUEEN'S WEAPON IS TRANSFORMED...
...AND SHE IS NEGATED BY HER OWN VIOLENCE ...FOR THE PRESENT.
SUCH IS THE POWER OF *LOVE,* HIPPOLYTA!
THY *COURAGE* HAS MADE MY HEART *REJOICE,* FAIR VENUS--
--A JOY THAT IS *BOUNDLESS* AS MINE EYES PERCEIVE A REUNION OF *ALL* THE MORTALS THAT DID *ALLY* THEMSELVES WITH OUR *JUST CAUSE!*
IF THAT MEAMS YOU'RE GLAD TO *SEE US,* HERC--
--THEN IT'S *DITTO!* THE FEELING'S *MUTUAL!*


UNNNH! FEEL LIKE I'M BEING KILLED AND ALLOWED TO WATCH IT HAPPEN!
NO! THIS WILL NOT BE!
SO YOU ARE, MORTAL! TWICE HAVE YOU DARED THE WRATH OF DEATH! TWICE HAVE YOU DEFIED ME!
THERE WILL BE NO THIRD TIME!
GET THEE BEHIND ME, MORTALS! YOUR STRENGTH IS NO MATCH FOR PLUTO!
NOR IS YOURS, HERCULES! YOU WILL BE SLAIN!
AS WOULD ANY OF US!
WE CANNOT HOPE TO WIN OVER PLUTO! THAT IS FOR ANOTHER POWER, ANOTHER STRENGTH!
WIDOW, YOU'RE COMIN' IN LOUD AND CLEAR!
BLAZE! WHAT--?
PLUTO'S GOTTA BE STOPPED, ANGEL!
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!
YOU FOOL, HE'LL KILL YOU!
THINE ALLY SPEAKS TRUTH, MORTAL!
I'LL BET HE DOES, PLUTO! BUT I'M NOT STUPID ENOUGH TO TAKE ON ONE LORD OF HELL-- NOT AFTER WHAT I WENT THROUGH TANGLING WITH ANOTHER!
WHAT? YOU PASS ME BY?
YOU GOT IT, DEATH-GOD!
THERE'S ONLY ONE DUDE THAT CAN TAKE YOU ON AND COME AWAY CLEAN--
--AND NONE OF US--NOT EVEN HERCULES--ARE IN HIS LEAGUE!


YOUR LEAGUE, ZEUS!
YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STAND AGAINST PLUTO!
AND YOU COPPED OUT! WAS IT EASY TO SELL YOUR SON TO DEATH, PAL?
BY CHRONUS, MORTAL, THOU DOST TOY WITH DOOM!
ALL MY LIFE, ZEUS... SINCE I THOUGHT I COULDN'T MAKE IT ON MY OWN! SINCE I ASKED THE DEVIL FOR HELP--
--AND ACCEPTED IT!
THE WAY YOU ARE ACCEPTING PLUTO'S LIES!
LIES?
SURE! WHAT DO YOU THINK HE HAD TO PROMISE THOSE OTHER DEATH-GODS IN ORDER TO GET THEIR UNITY? DIDN'T IT OCCUR TO YOU THAT IT MIGHT BE YOUR HEAD ON A PLATTER?
PLUTO!!
I ALLOWED A MORTAL WEAKNESS TO POSSESS ME SO THAT I DID NOT SEE THY DUPLICITY!
GET THEE GONE, DEATH-GOD! ZEUS WILL DEAL WITH THEE LATER!
I--
--I GO, MY LORD ZEUS!
MY SON... VENUS! 'TWAS AGAINST THEE THAT I DID ERR! YOURS IS THE CHOICE OF PUNISHMENT!
NAME WHAT THOU WOULDST SEE DONE TO THE MISCREANTS AND IT SHALL BE THINE!
WE ASK--
--FORGIVENESS, MY LORD!
FORGIVE THOSE THAT DID STRIKE AT US!
GODDESS! ARE YE--?
WHAT??


I BEG THEE NOT TO LET THEIR MADNESS RULE OUR SENSE OF LOVE, MY LORD!
WOULD MEN SAY WE WERE ANY BETTER WERE WE TO TAKE VENGEANCE UPON THOSE THAT SOUGHT TO HURT US?
PLUTO! ARES! HIPPOLYTA! THESE THREE ARE DOOMED TO A HELL OF THEIR OWN MAKING!
A HELL OF PETTY PLOTS AND SCHEMINGS ...INTO WHICH NO LIGHT, NOR PURITY MAY EVER REACH!
IS THAT NOT PUNISHMENT ENOUGH, MY LORD?
IF YOU SAY IT... THEN 'TIS SO, GODDESS!
THE CHOICE WAS YOURS... AND I CONCUR!
IT WILL BE AS YOU SAY!
THERE GOES ONE VERY FINE WOMAN, GROUP!
VENUS, I--
AND I THINK UCLA'S JUST LOST A DEPARTMENT-HEAD!
AYE! VENUS HATH DONE WITH HER MORTAL GUISE FOR THE NONCE! SHE HATH LEARNED THAT SHE IS EVER A GODDESS--
--AND THAT LOVE IS NEEDED IN HEAVEN AS WELL AS EARTH!
HERCULES... MY SON, I--
FATHER, WE ARE IMMORTALS--RULED BY IMMORTAL PASSIONS!
THOUGH THOU KNOWEST ALL--THERE IS STILL MUCH FOR US BOTH TO LEARN!
I, FROM THE MORTALS, FROM WHENCE CAME MY MOTHER--
AND I FROM MY SON, WHO GOES WITH MY BLESSING!
THANK YOU, FATHER!
HERCULES THANKS THEE!


IT IS TIME, MY FATHER! I MUST GO-- BACK TO EARTH!
I HAVE LEFT MUCH UNDONE--
--INCLUDING A LECTURE ON THYSELF AS A MYTH!
I WOULD GREATLY LIKE TO HEAR IT, MY SON!
'TWOULD FILL ALL OLYMPUS WITH LAUGHTER!
I WILL DETAIN THEE AND THY FRIENDS NO LONGER!
RETURN, HERCULES, TO THY MOTHER'S LAND!
THOU GOEST WITH THE LOVE OF ZEUS!
COME, MY FRIENDS--
--TO EARTH!
THEY GO, MY LORD!
THEY ARE GONE, DIONYSIUS!
MY LORD, DOST THOU RECALL THAT ENCHANTED MEAD I DID BREW A FORTNIGHT PAST?
AYE, DIONYSIUS! BE THERE ANY LEFT?
WITHOUT A DOUBT, MY LORD ZEUS!
EARTH!
YES, MY FRIENDS! WE ARE BACK!
BACK! BUT WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?
THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN A MERE SIXTY DAYS, TRUE BELIEVER, IN A TALE WE CALL--
MURDER AT MALIBU!

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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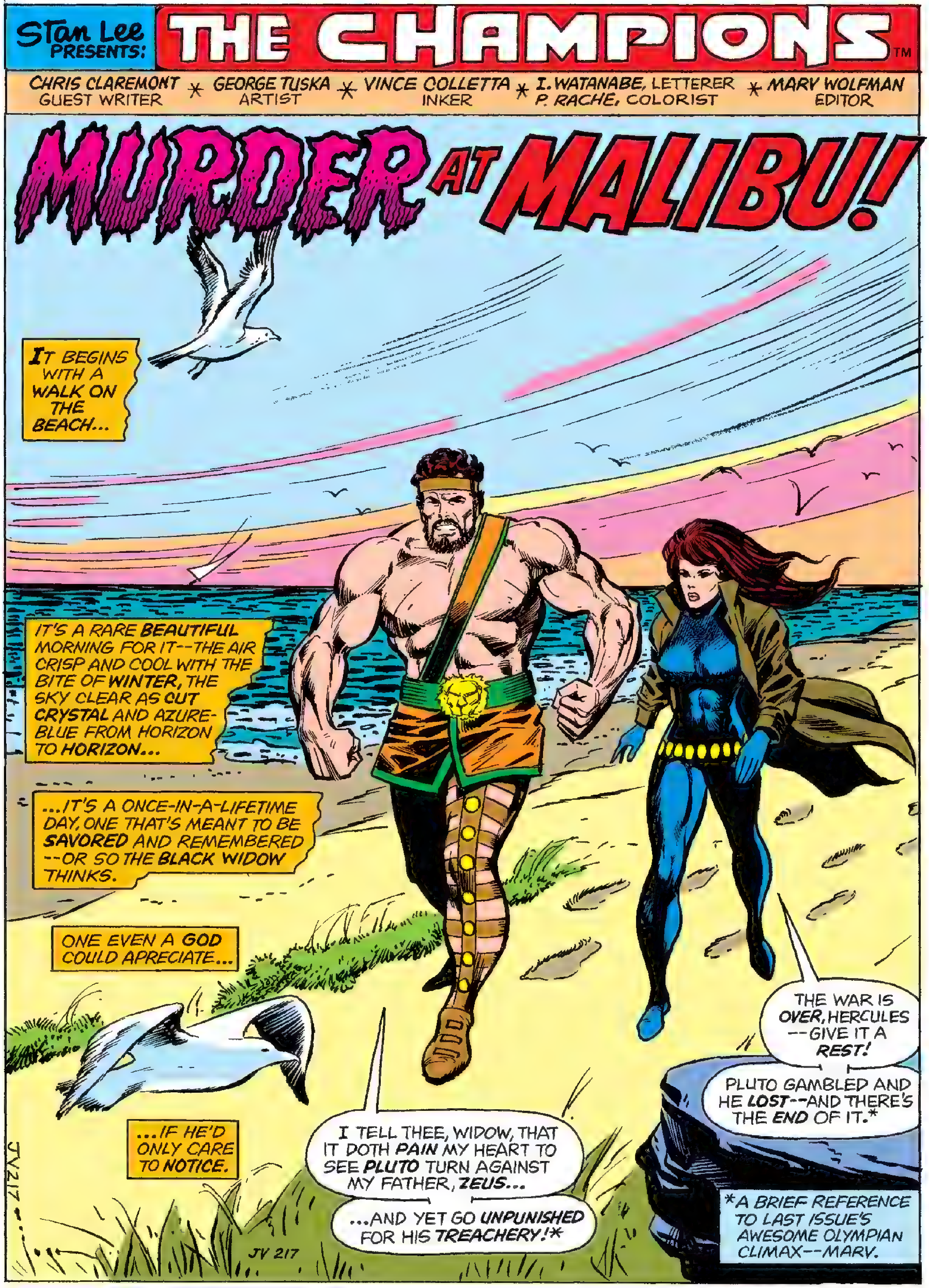
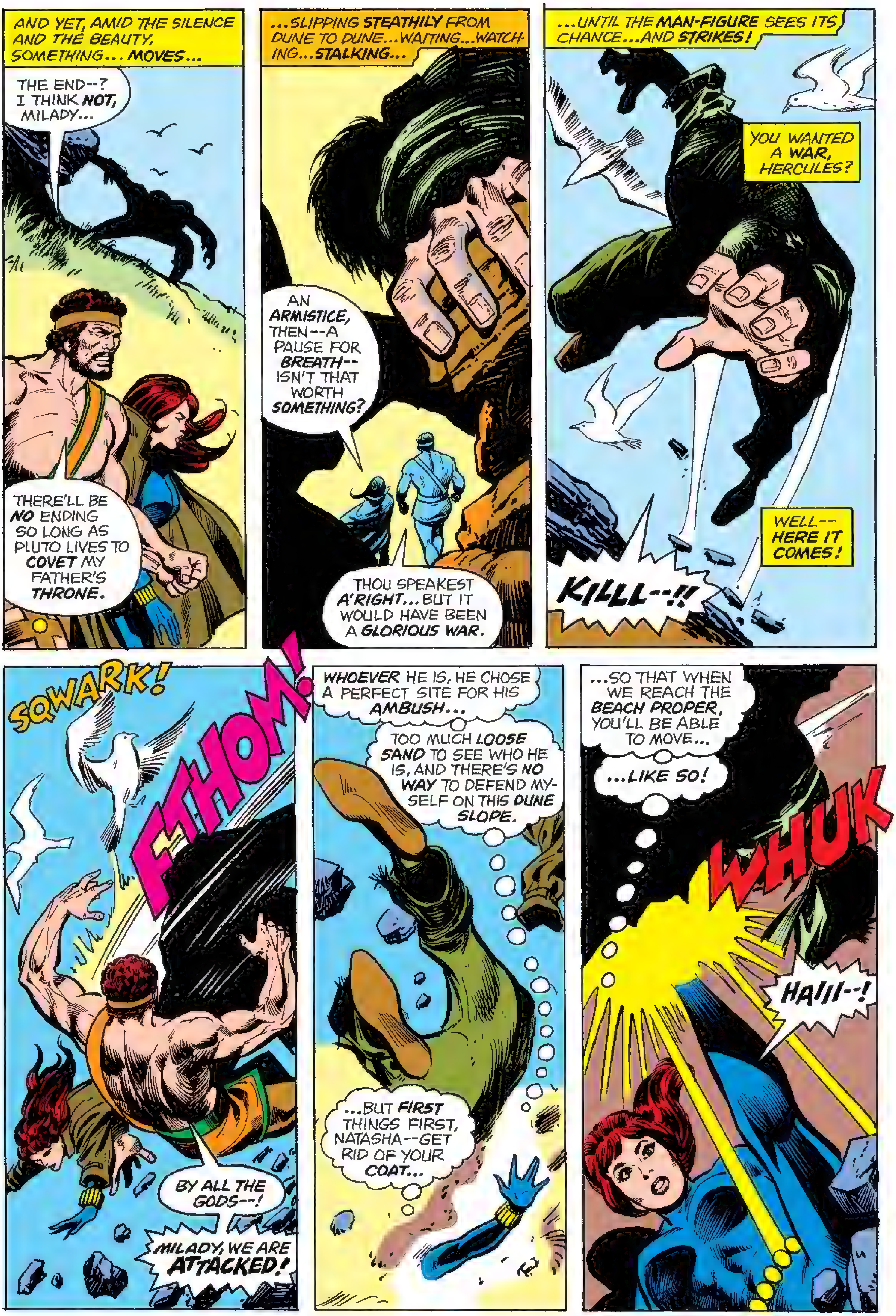
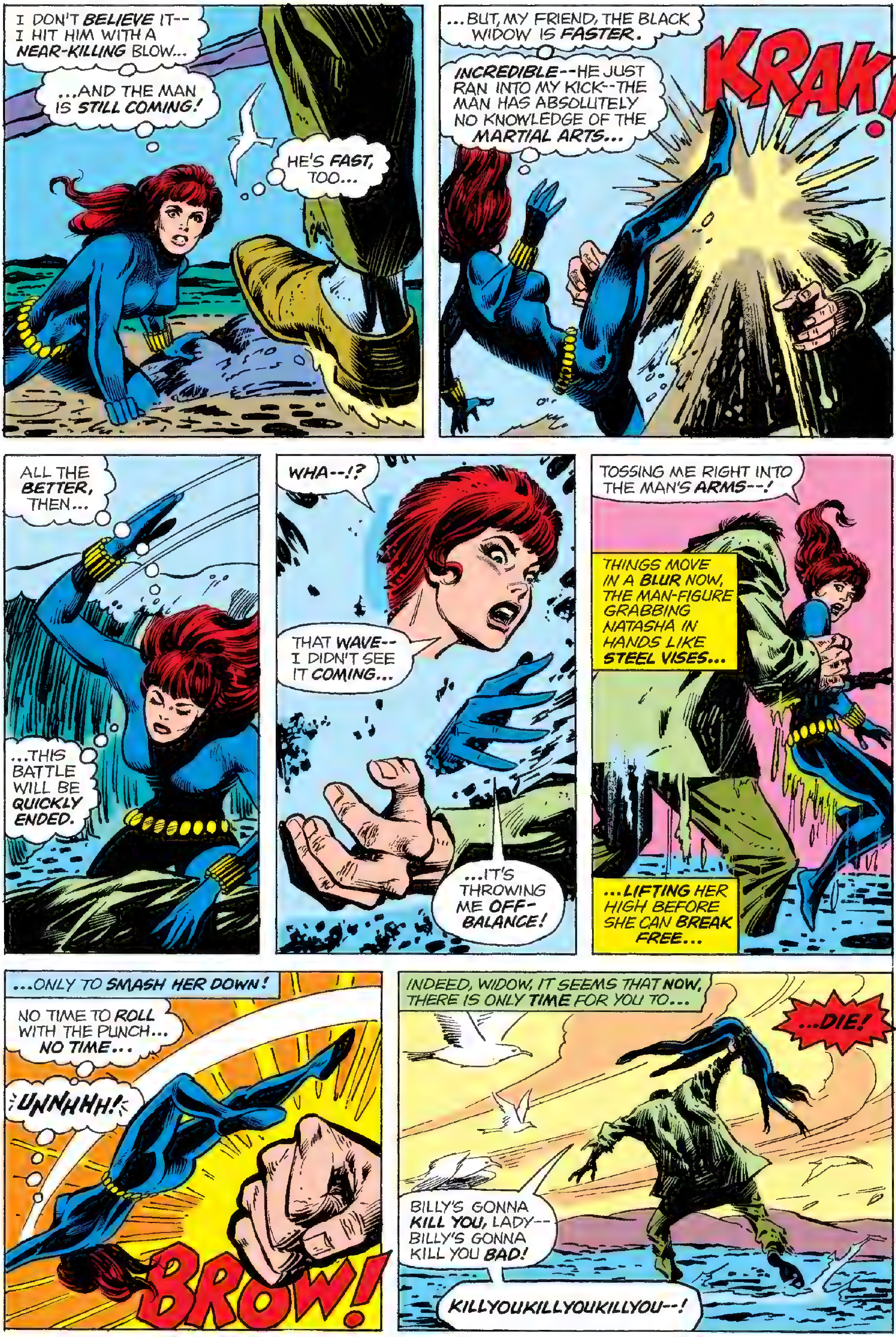
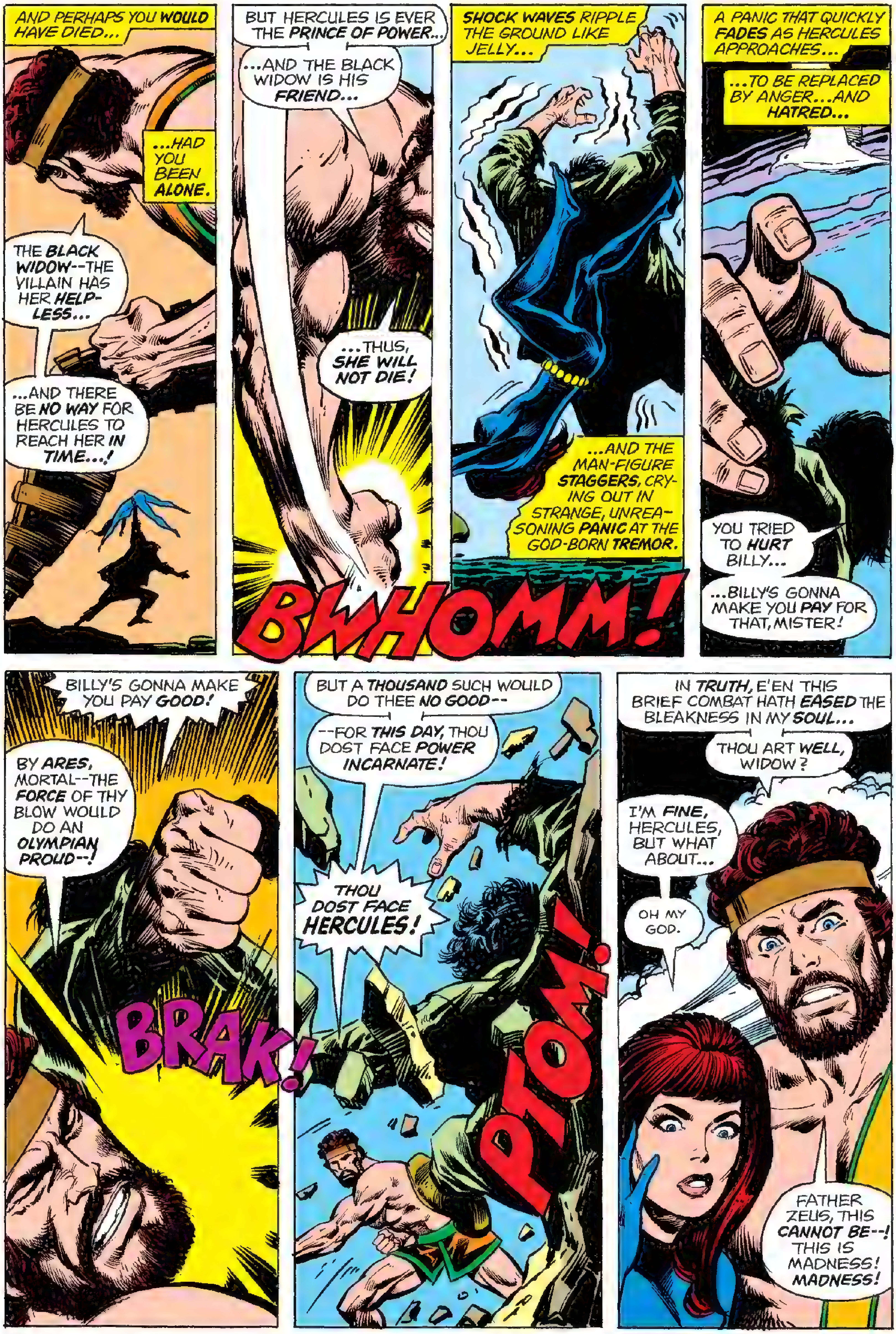
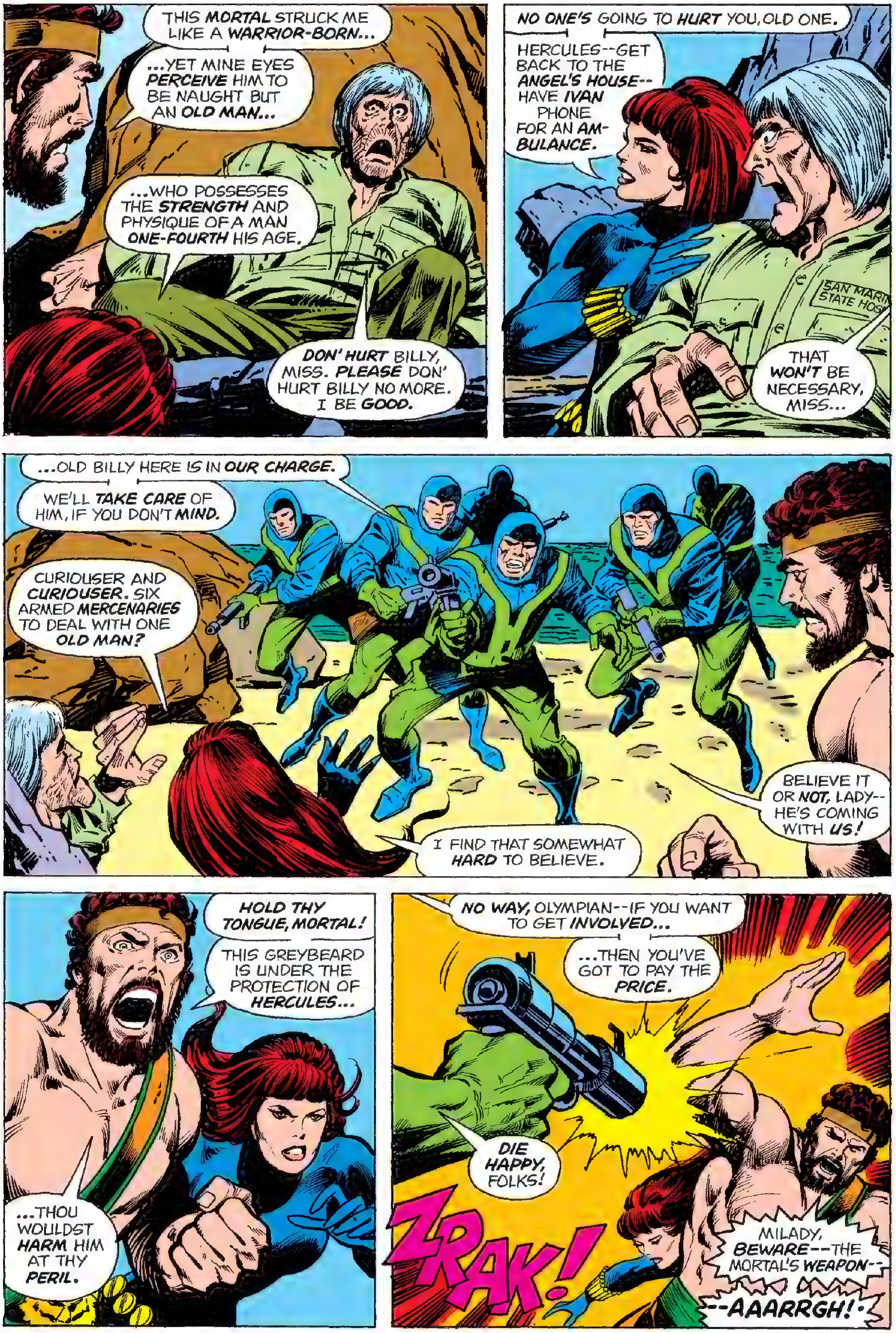
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
IT'S CHAMPION VERSUS CHAMPION IN A BATTLE TO THE DEATH!
THE SLUGFEST YOU DARE NOT MISS!
MURDER AT MALIBU!

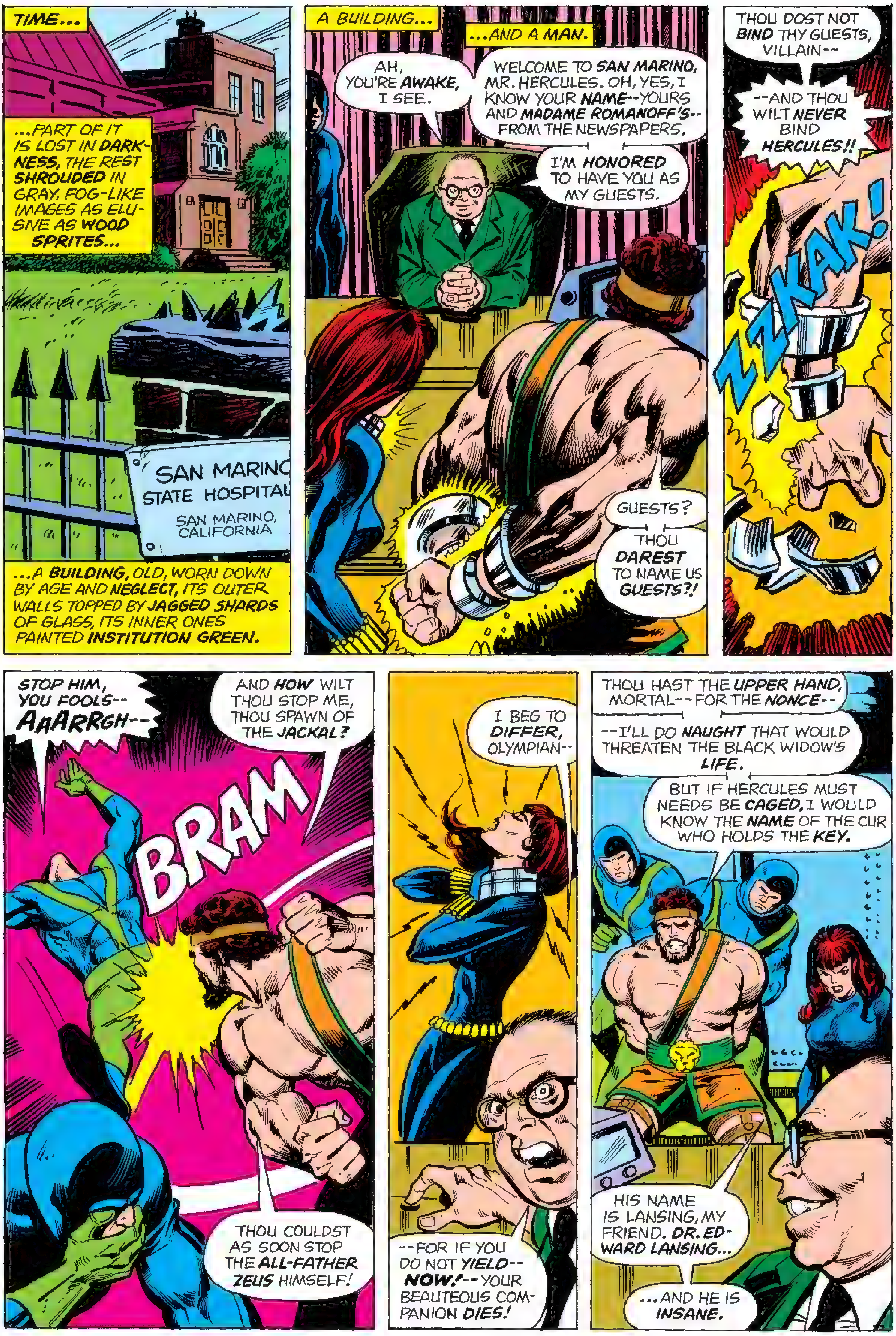

Stan Lee PRESENTS:
THE CHAMPIONS™
CHRIS CLAREMONT GUEST WRITER ✶ GEORGE TUSKA ARTIST ✶ VINCE COLLETTA INKER ✶ I. WATANABE, LETTERER P. RACHE, COLORIST ✶ MARY WOLFMAN EDITOR
MURDER AT MALIBU!
IT BEGINS WITH A WALK ON THE BEACH...
IT'S A RARE BEAUTIFUL MORNING FOR IT--THE AIR CRISP AND COOL WITH THE BITE OF WINTER, THE SKY CLEAR AS CUT CRYSTAL AND AZURE-BLUE FROM HORIZON TO HORIZON...
...IT'S A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME DAY, ONE THAT'S MEANT TO BE SAVORED AND REMEMBERED --OR SO THE BLACK WIDOW THINKS.
ONE EVEN A GOD COULD APRECIATE...
...IF HE'D ONLY CARE TO NOTICE.
I TELL THEE, WIDOW, THAT IT DOTH PAIN MY HEART TO SEE PLUTO TURN AGAINST MY FATHER, ZEUS...
...AND YET GO UNPUNISHED FOR HIS TREACHERY!*
THE WAR IS OVER, HERCULES --GIVE IT A REST!
PLUTO GAMBLED AND HE LOST--AND THERE'S THE END OF IT.*
*A BRIEF REFERENCE TO LAST ISSUE'S AWESOME OLYMPIAN CLIMAX--MARV.
JV 217
JV217

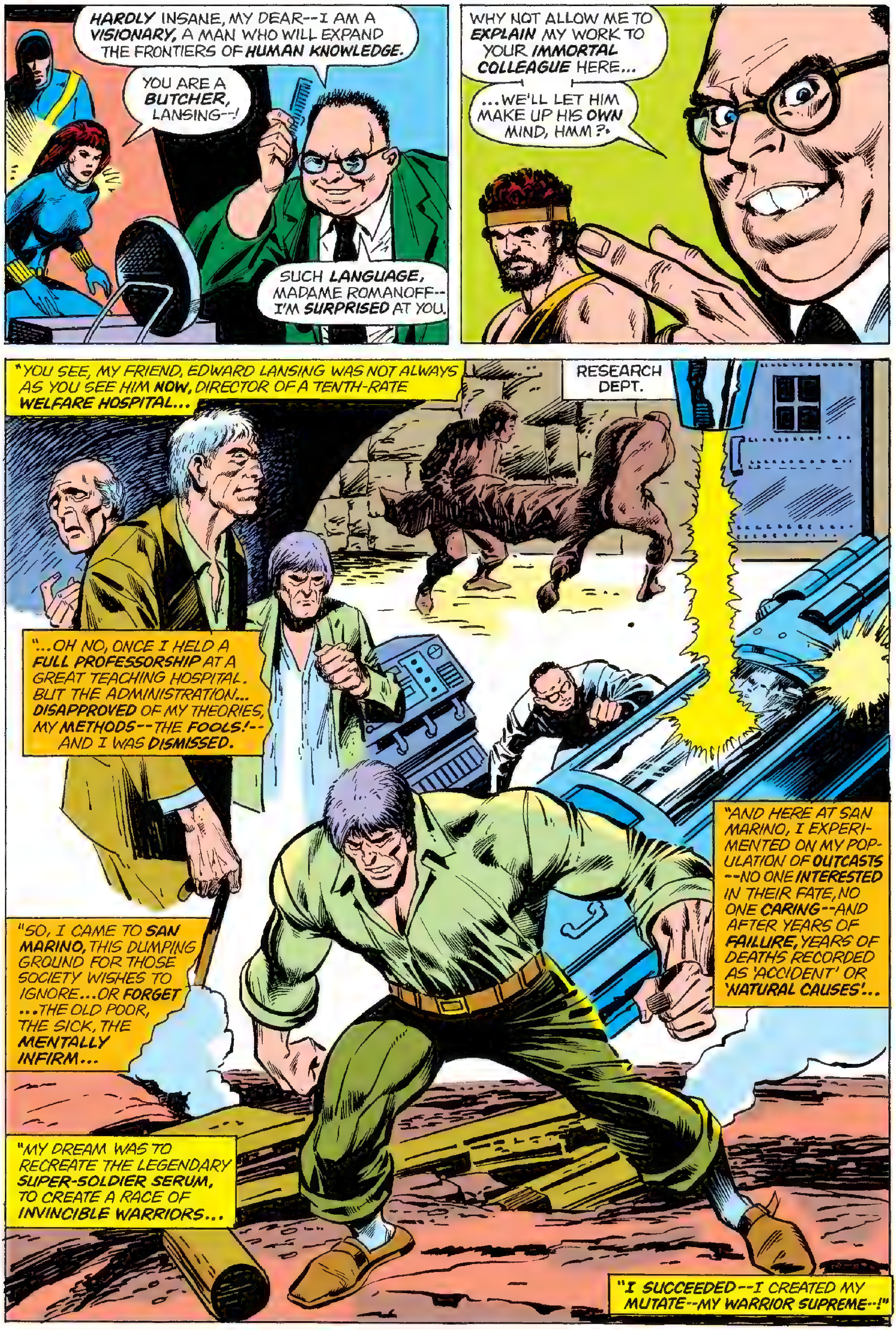

AND YET, AMID THE SILENCE AND THE BEAUTY, SOMETHING... MOVES...
THE END--? I THINK NOT, MILADY...
THERE'LL BE NO ENDING SO LONG AS PLUTO LIVES TO COVET MY FATHER'S THRONE.
...SLIPPING STEATHILY FROM DUNE TO DUNE...WAITING...WATCHING...STALKING...
AN ARMISTICE, THEN--A PAUSE FOR BREATH-- ISN'T THAT WORTH SOMETHING?
THOU SPEAKEST A'RIGHT... BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A GLORIOUS WAR.
...UNTIL THE MAN-FIGURE SEES ITS CHANCE...AND STRIKES!
YOU WANTED A WAR, HERCULES?
WELL-- HERE IT COMES!
KILLL--!!
SQWARK!
FTHOM!
BY ALL THE GODS--!
MILADY, WE ARE ATTACKED!
WHOEVER HE IS, HE CHOSE A PERFECT SITE FOR HIS AMBUSH...
TOO MUCH LOOSE SAND TO SEE WHO HE IS, AND THERE'S NO WAY TO DEFEND MYSELF ON THIS DUNE SLOPE.
...BUT FIRST THINGS FIRST, NATASHA--GET RID OF YOUR COAT...
...SO THAT WHEN WE REACH THE BEACH PROPER, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO MOVE...
...LIKE SO!
WHUK
HAIII--!

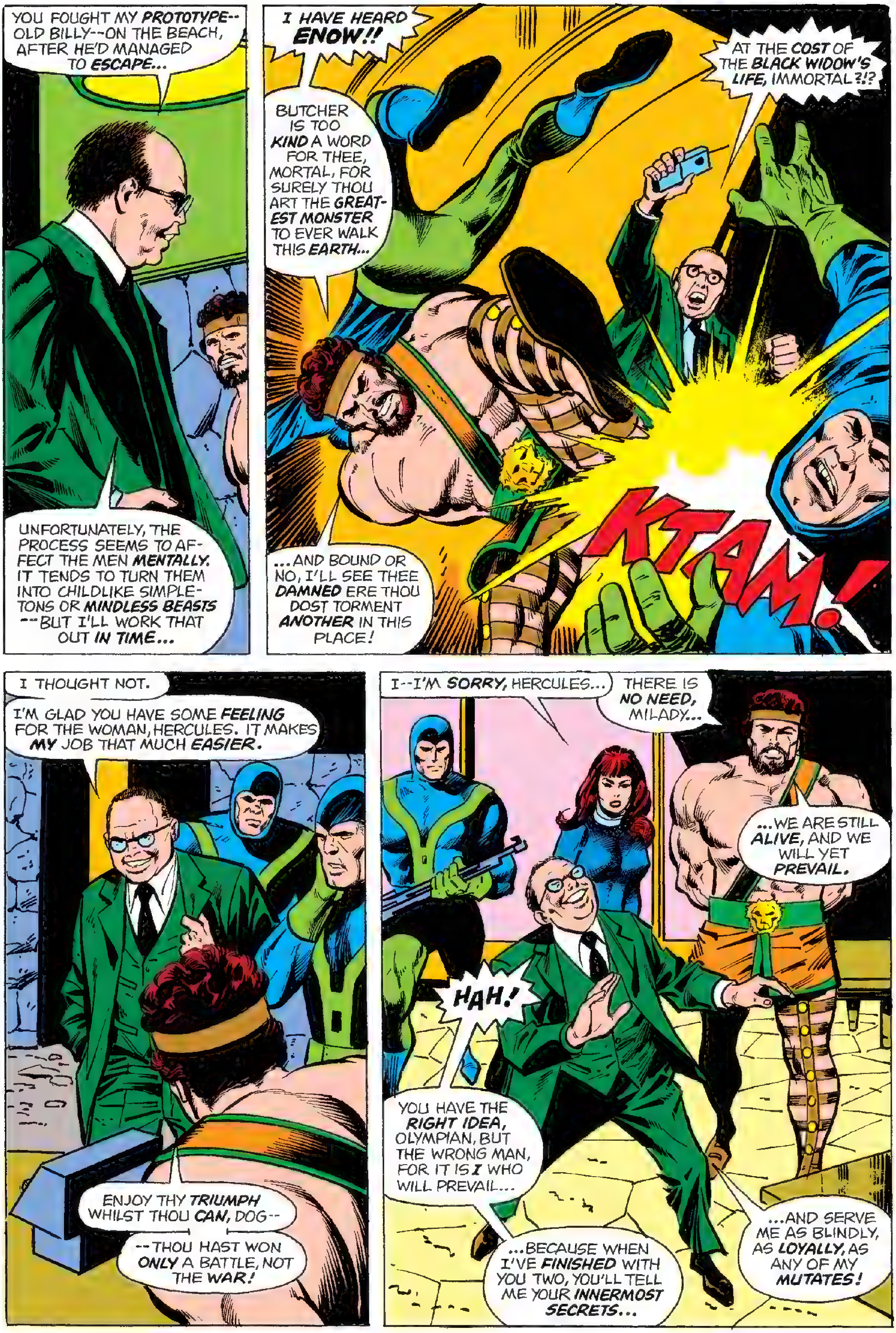

I DON'T BELIEVE IT-- I HIT HIM WITH A NEAR-KILLING BLOW...
...AND THE MAN IS STILL COMING!
HE'S FAST, TOO...
...BUT, MY FRIEND, THE BLACK WIDOW IS FASTER.
INCREDIBLE--HE JUST RAN INTO MY KICK--THE MAN HAS ABSOLUTELY NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE MARTIAL ARTS...
KRAK!
ALL THE BETTER, THEN...
...THIS BATTLE WILL BE QUICKLY ENDED.
WHA--!?
THAT WAVE-- I DIDN'T SEE IT COMING...
...IT'S THROWING ME OFF-BALANCE!
TOSSING ME RIGHT INTO THE MAN'S ARMS--!
THINGS MOVE IN A BLUR NOW, THE MAN-FIGURE GRABBING NATASHA IN HANDS LIKE STEEL VISES...
...LIFTING HER HIGH BEFORE SHE CAN BREAK FREE...
...ONLY TO SMASH HER DOWN!
NO TIME TO ROLL WITH THE PUNCH... NO TIME...
UNNHHH!
BROW!
INDEED, WIDOW, IT SEEMS THAT NOW, THERE IS ONLY TIME FOR YOU TO...
...DIE!
BILLY'S GONNA KILL YOU, LADY-- BILLY'S GONNA KILL YOU BAD!
KILLYOUKILLYOUKILLYOU--!

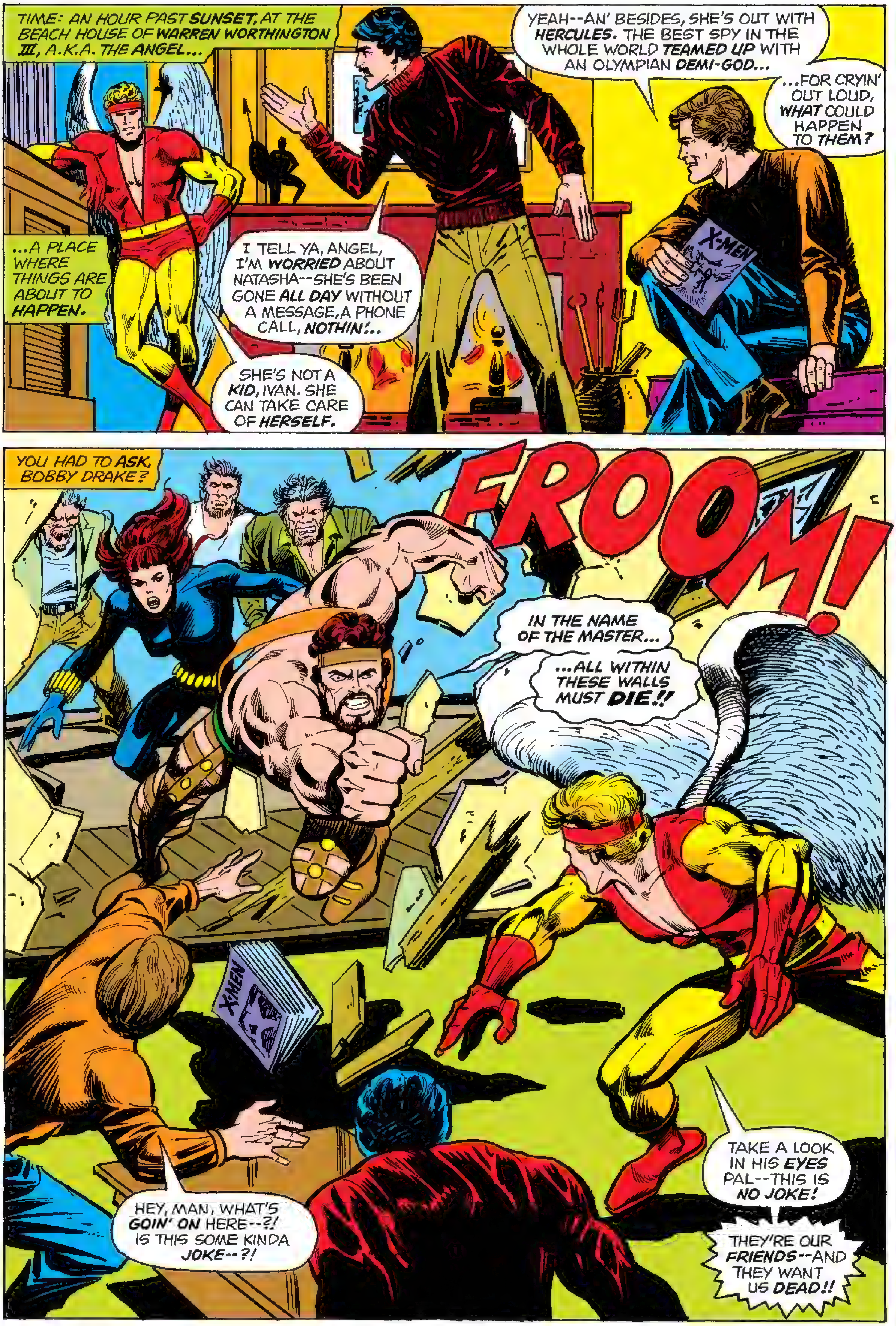

AND PERHAPS YOU WOULD HAVE DIED...
...HAD YOU BEEN ALONE.
THE BLACK WIDOW--THE VILLAIN HAS HER HELPLESS...
...AND THERE BE NO WAY FOR HERCULES TO REACH HER IN TIME...!
BUT HERCULES IS EVER THE PRINCE OF POWER...
...AND THE BLACK WIDOW IS HIS FRIEND...
...THUS, SHE WILL NOT DIE!
SHOCK WAVES RIPPLE THE GROUND LIKE JELLY...
...AND THE MAN-FIGURE STAGGERS, CRYING OUT IN STRANGE, UNREASONING PANIC AT THE GOD-BORN TREMOR.
BWHOMM!
A PANIC THAT QUICKLY FADES AS HERCULES APPROACHES...
...TO BE REPLACED BY ANGER...AND HATRED...
YOU TRIED TO HURT BILLY...
...BILLY'S GONNA MAKE YOU PAY FOR THAT, MISTER!
BILLY'S GONNA MAKE YOU PAY GOOD!
BY ARES, MORTAL--THE FORCE OF THY BLOW WOULD DO AN OLYMPIAN PROUD--!
BRAK!
BUT A THOUSAND SUCH WOULD DO THEE NO GOOD--
--FOR THIS DAY, THOU DOST FACE POWER INCARNATE!
THOU DOST FACE HERCULES!
PTOM!
IN TRUTH, E'EN THIS BRIEF COMBAT HATH EASED THE BLEAKNESS IN MY SOUL...
THOU ART WELL, WIDOW?
I'M FINE, HERCULES, BUT WHAT ABOUT...
OH MY GOD.
FATHER ZEUS, THIS CANNOT BE--! THIS IS MADNESS! MADNESS!

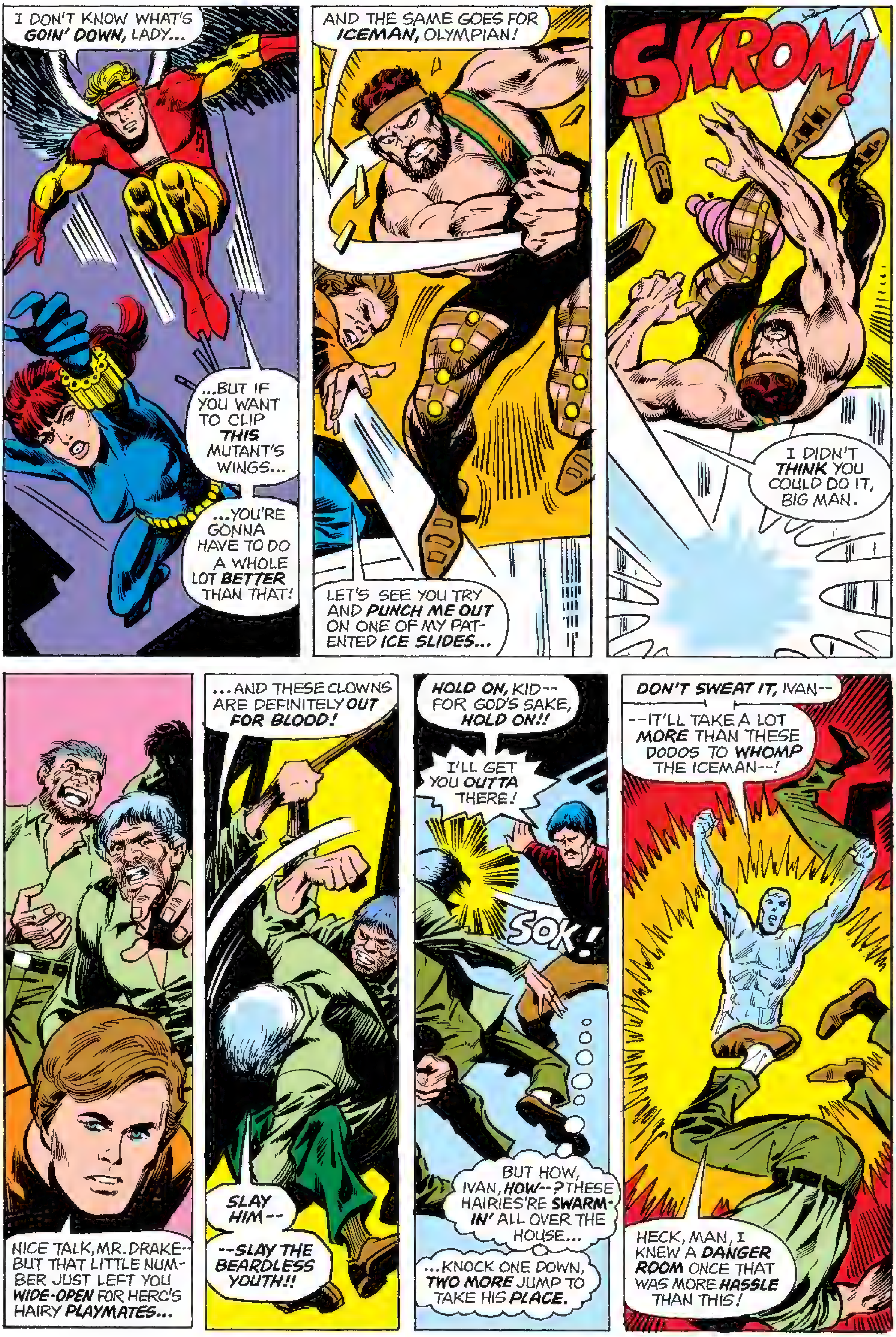

THIS MORTAL STRUCK ME LIKE A WARRIOR-BORN...
...YET MINE EYES PERCEIVE HIM TO BE NAUGHT BUT AN OLD MAN...
...WHO POSSESSES THE STRENGTH AND PHYSIQUE OF A MAN ONE-FOURTH HIS AGE.
DON' HURT BILLY, MISS. PLEASE DON' HURT BILLY NO MORE. I BE GOOD.
NO ONE'S GOING TO HURT YOU, OLD ONE.
HERCULES--GET BACK TO THE ANGEL'S HOUSE--HAVE IVAN PHONE FOR AN AMBULANCE.
SAN MARI STATE HOS
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, MISS...
...OLD BILLY HERE IS IN OUR CHARGE.
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER. SIX ARMED MERCENARIES TO DEAL WITH ONE OLD MAN?
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, LADY--HE'S COMING WITH US!
I FIND THAT SOMEWHAT HARD TO BELIEVE.
HOLD THY TONGUE, MORTAL!
THIS GREYBEARD IS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF HERCULES...
...THOU WOULDST HARM HIM AT THY PERIL.
NO WAY, OLYMPIAN--IF YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED...
...THEN YOU'VE GOT TO PAY THE PRICE.
DIE HAPPY, FOLKS!
ZRAK!
MILADY, BEWARE--THE MORTAL'S WEAPON--
--AAARRGH!

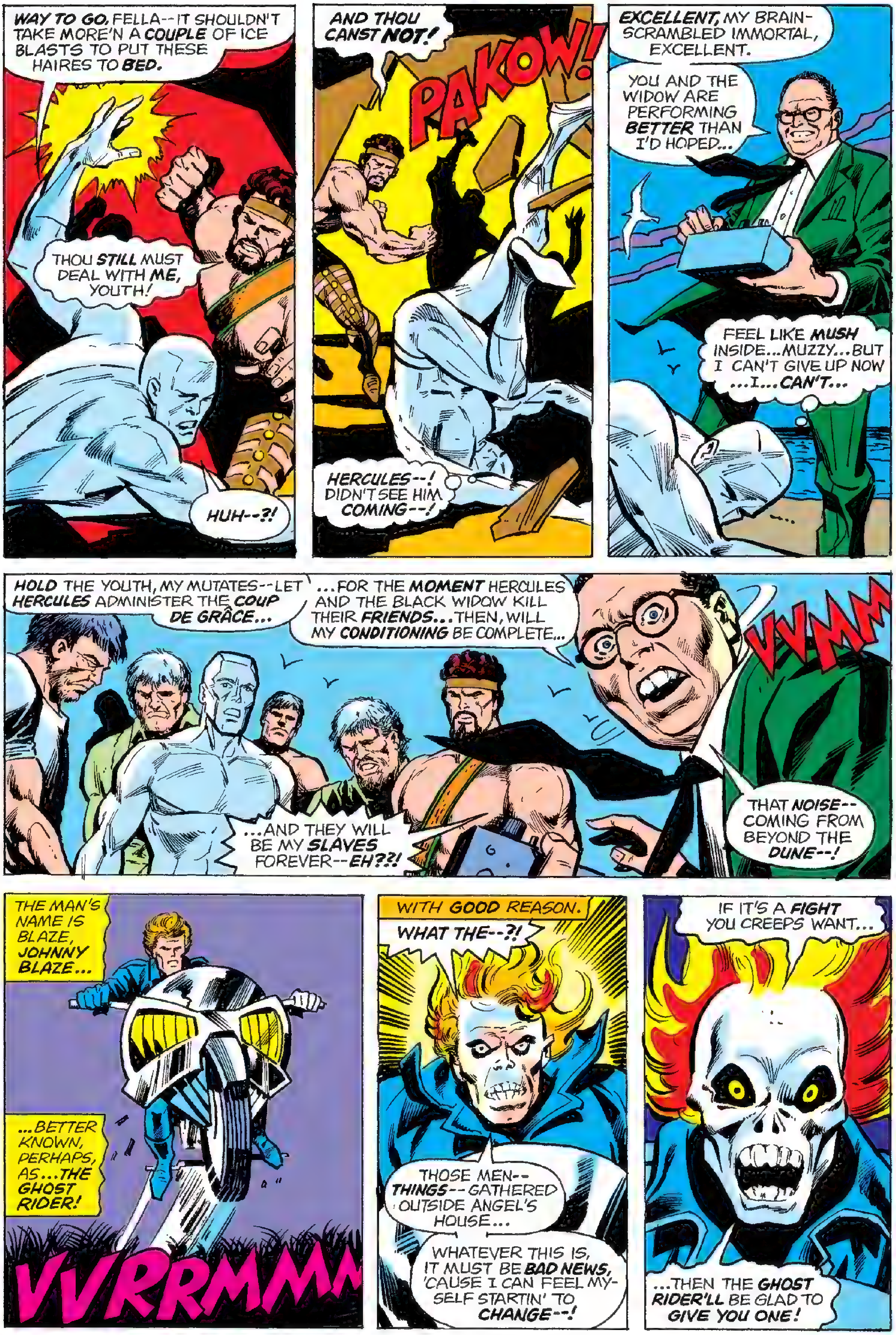

TIME...
...PART OF IT IS LOST IN DARKNESS, THE REST SHROUDED IN GRAY, FOG-LIKE IMAGES AS ELUSIVE AS WOOD SPRITES...
SAN MARINO STATE HOSPITAL SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA
...A BUILDING, OLD, WORN DOWN BY AGE AND NEGLECT, ITS OUTER WALLS TOPPED BY JAGGED SHARDS OF GLASS, ITS INNER ONES PAINTED INSTITUTION GREEN.
A BUILDING...
...AND A MAN.
AH, YOU'RE AWAKE, I SEE.
WELCOME TO SAN MARINO, MR. HERCULES. OH, YES, I KNOW YOUR NAME--YOURS AND MADAME ROMANOFF'S--FROM THE NEWSPAPERS.
I'M HONORED TO HAVE YOU AS MY GUESTS.
GUESTS?
THOU DAREST TO NAME US GUESTS?!
THOU DOST NOT BIND THY GUESTS, VILLAIN--
--AND THOU WILT NEVER BIND HERCULES!!
ZZKAK!
STOP HIM, YOU FOOLS--AAARRGH--
AND HOW WILT THOU STOP ME, THOU SPAWN OF THE JACKAL?
BRAM
THOU COULDST AS SOON STOP THE ALL-FATHER ZEUS HIMSELF!
I BEG TO DIFFER, OLYMPIAN--
--FOR IF YOU DO NOT YIELD--NOW!--YOUR BEAUTEOUS COMPANION DIES!
THOU HAST THE UPPER HAND, MORTAL--FOR THE NONCE--
--I'LL DO NAUGHT THAT WOULD THREATEN THE BLACK WIDOW'S LIFE.
BUT IF HERCULES MUST NEEDS BE CAGED, I WOULD KNOW THE NAME OF THE CUR WHO HOLDS THE KEY.
HIS NAME IS LANSING, MY FRIEND. DR. EDWARD LANSING...
...AND HE IS INSANE.

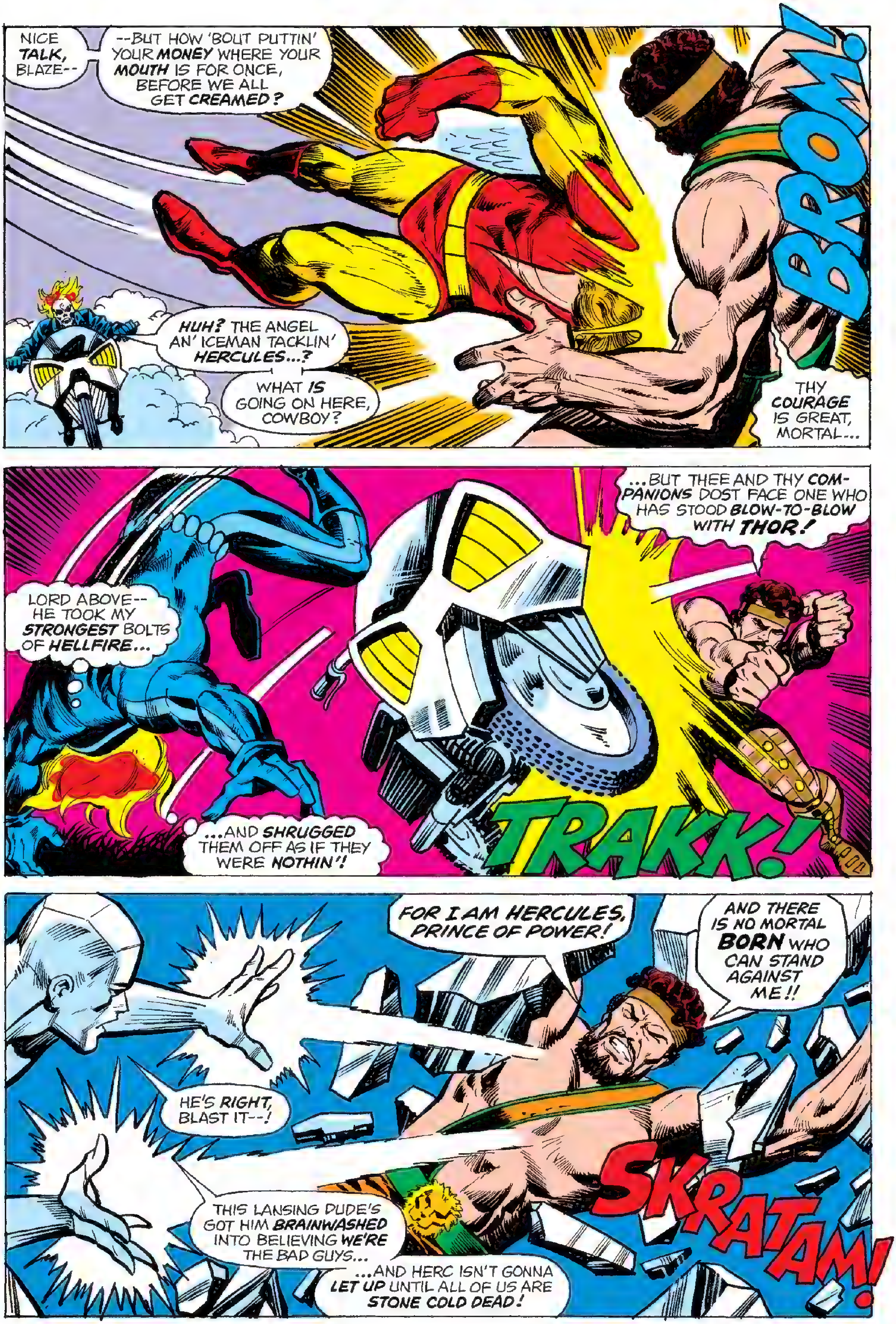

HARDLY INSANE, MY DEAR--I AM A VISIONARY, A MAN WHO WILL EXPAND THE FRONTIERS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.
YOU ARE A BUTCHER, LANSING--!
SUCH LANGUAGE, MADAME ROMANOFF--I'M SURPRISED AT YOU.
WHY NOT ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN MY WORK TO YOUR IMMORTAL COLLEAGUE HERE...
...WE'LL LET HIM MAKE UP HIS OWN MIND, HMM?
"YOU SEE, MY FRIEND, EDWARD LANSING WAS NOT ALWAYS AS YOU SEE HIM NOW, DIRECTOR OF A TENTH-RATE WELFARE HOSPITAL...
RESEARCH DEPT.
"...OH NO, ONCE I HELD A FULL PROFESSORSHIP AT A GREAT TEACHING HOSPITAL. BUT THE ADMINISTRATION... DISAPPROVED OF MY THEORIES, MY METHODS--THE FOOLS!--AND I WAS DISMISSED.
"SO, I CAME TO SAN MARINO, THIS DUMPING GROUND FOR THOSE SOCIETY WISHES TO IGNORE...OR FORGET ...THE OLD POOR, THE SICK, THE MENTALLY INFIRM...
"AND HERE AT SAN MARINO, I EXPERIMENTED ON MY POPULATION OF OUTCASTS --NO ONE INTERESTED IN THEIR FATE, NO ONE CARING--AND AFTER YEARS OF FAILURE, YEARS OF DEATHS RECORDED AS 'ACCIDENT' OR 'NATURAL CAUSES'...
"MY DREAM WAS TO RECREATE THE LEGENDARY SUPER-SOLDIER SERUM, TO CREATE A RACE OF INVINCIBLE WARRIORS...
"I SUCCEEDED--I CREATED MY MUTATE--MY WARRIOR SUPREME--!"

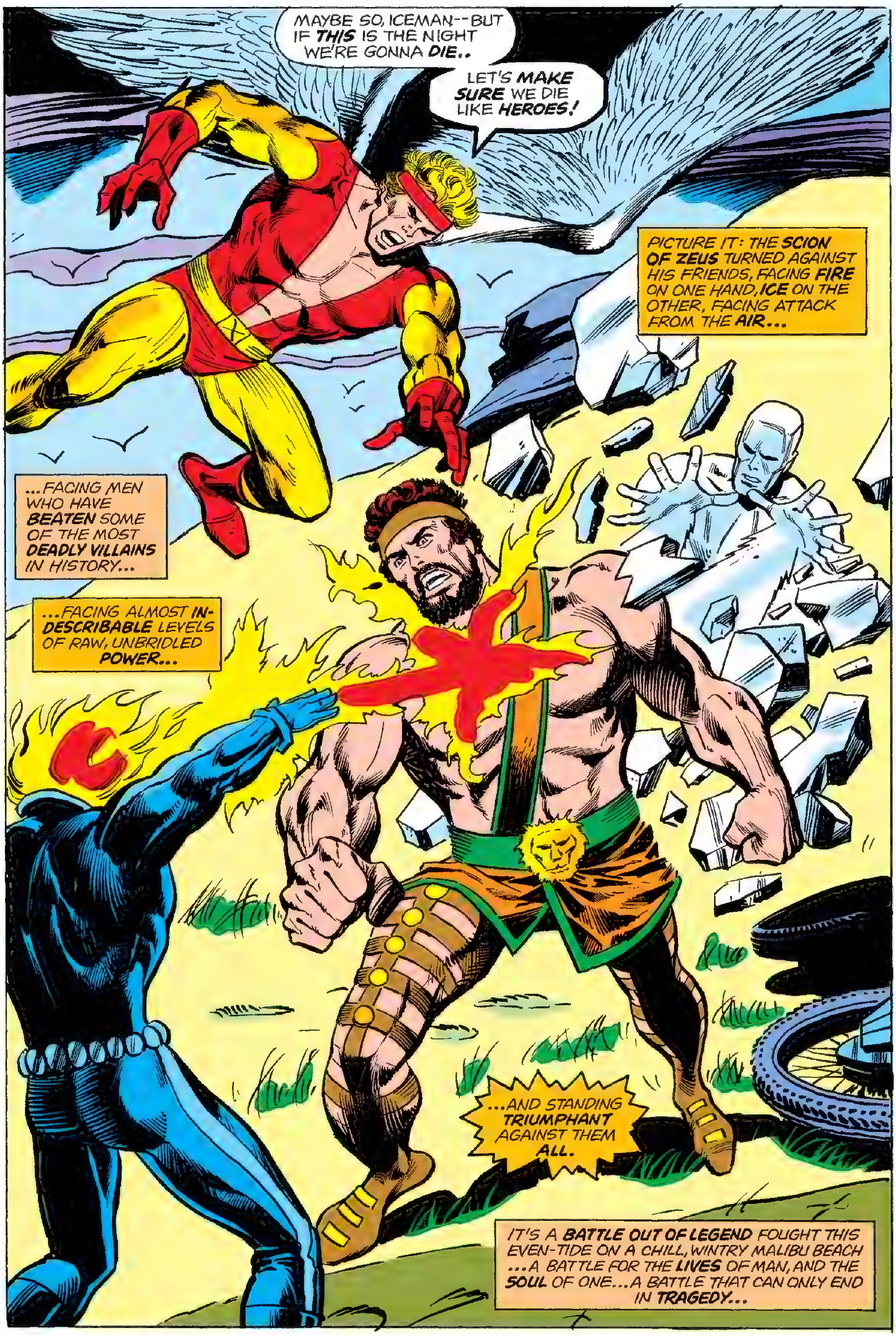

YOU FOUGHT MY PROTOTYPE-- OLD BILLY--ON THE BEACH, AFTER HE'D MANAGED TO ESCAPE...
UNFORTUNATELY, THE PROCESS SEEMS TO AFFECT THE MEN MENTALLY. IT TENDS TO TURN THEM INTO CHILDLIKE SIMPLETONS OR MINDLESS BEASTS --BUT I'LL WORK THAT OUT IN TIME...
I HAVE HEARD ENOW!!
BUTCHER IS TOO KIND A WORD FOR THEE, MORTAL, FOR SURELY THOU ART THE GREATEST MONSTER TO EVER WALK THIS EARTH...
...AND BOUND OR NO, I'LL SEE THEE DAMNED ERE THOU DOST TORMENT ANOTHER IN THIS PLACE!
AT THE COST OF THE BLACK WIDOW'S LIFE, IMMORTAL?!?
KTAM!
I THOUGHT NOT.
I'M GLAD YOU HAVE SOME FEELING FOR THE WOMAN, HERCULES. IT MAKES MY JOB THAT MUCH EASIER.
ENJOY THY TRIUMPH WHILST THOU CAN, DOG--
--THOU HAST WON ONLY A BATTLE, NOT THE WAR!
I--I'M SORRY, HERCULES...
THERE IS NO NEED, MILADY...
...WE ARE STILL ALIVE, AND WE WILL YET PREVAIL.
HAH!
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA, OLYMPIAN, BUT THE WRONG MAN, FOR IT IS I WHO WILL PREVAIL...
...BECAUSE WHEN I'VE FINISHED WITH YOU TWO, YOU'LL TELL ME YOUR INNERMOST SECRETS...
...AND SERVE ME AS BLINDLY, AS LOYALLY, AS ANY OF MY MUTATES!

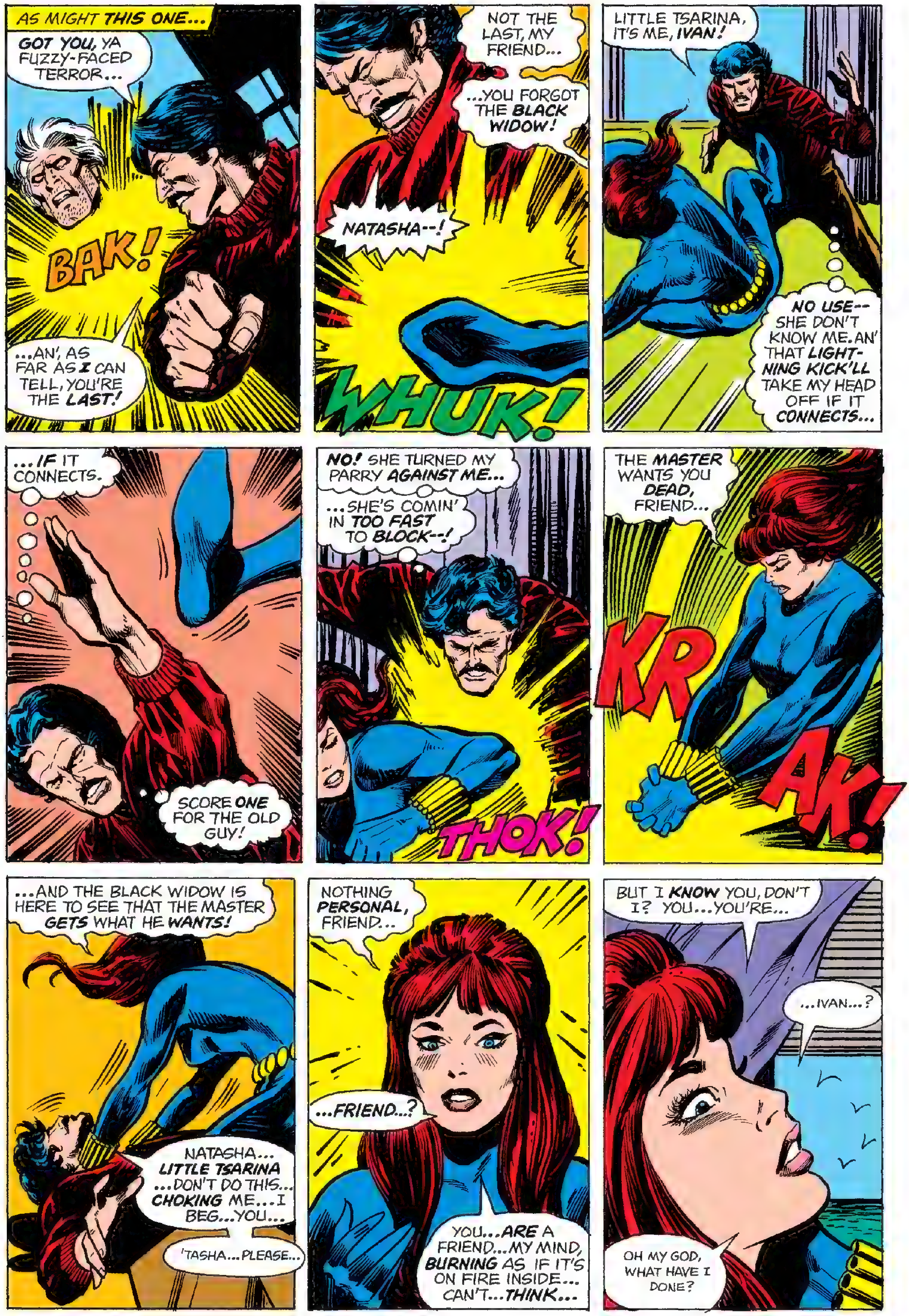

TIME: AN HOUR PAST SUNSET, AT THE BEACH HOUSE OF WARREN WORTHINGTON III, A.K.A. THE ANGEL...
YEAH--AN' BESIDES, SHE'S OUT WITH HERCULES. THE BEST SPY IN THE WHOLE WORLD TEAMED UP WITH AN OLYMPIAN DEMI-GOD...
...FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD, WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO THEM?
...A PLACE WHERE THINGS ARE ABOUT TO HAPPEN.
I TELL YA, ANGEL, I'M WORRIED ABOUT NATASHA--SHE'S BEEN GONE ALL DAY WITHOUT A MESSAGE, A PHONE CALL, NOTHIN'!..
SHE'S NOT A KID, IVAN. SHE CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF.
X-MEN
YOU HAD TO ASK, BOBBY DRAKE?
FROOM!
IN THE NAME OF THE MASTER...
...ALL WITHIN THESE WALLS MUST DIE!!
X-MEN
TAKE A LOOK IN HIS EYES PAL--THIS IS NO JOKE!
HEY, MAN, WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE--?! IS THIS SOME KINDA JOKE--?!
THEY'RE OUR FRIENDS--AND THEY WANT US DEAD!!

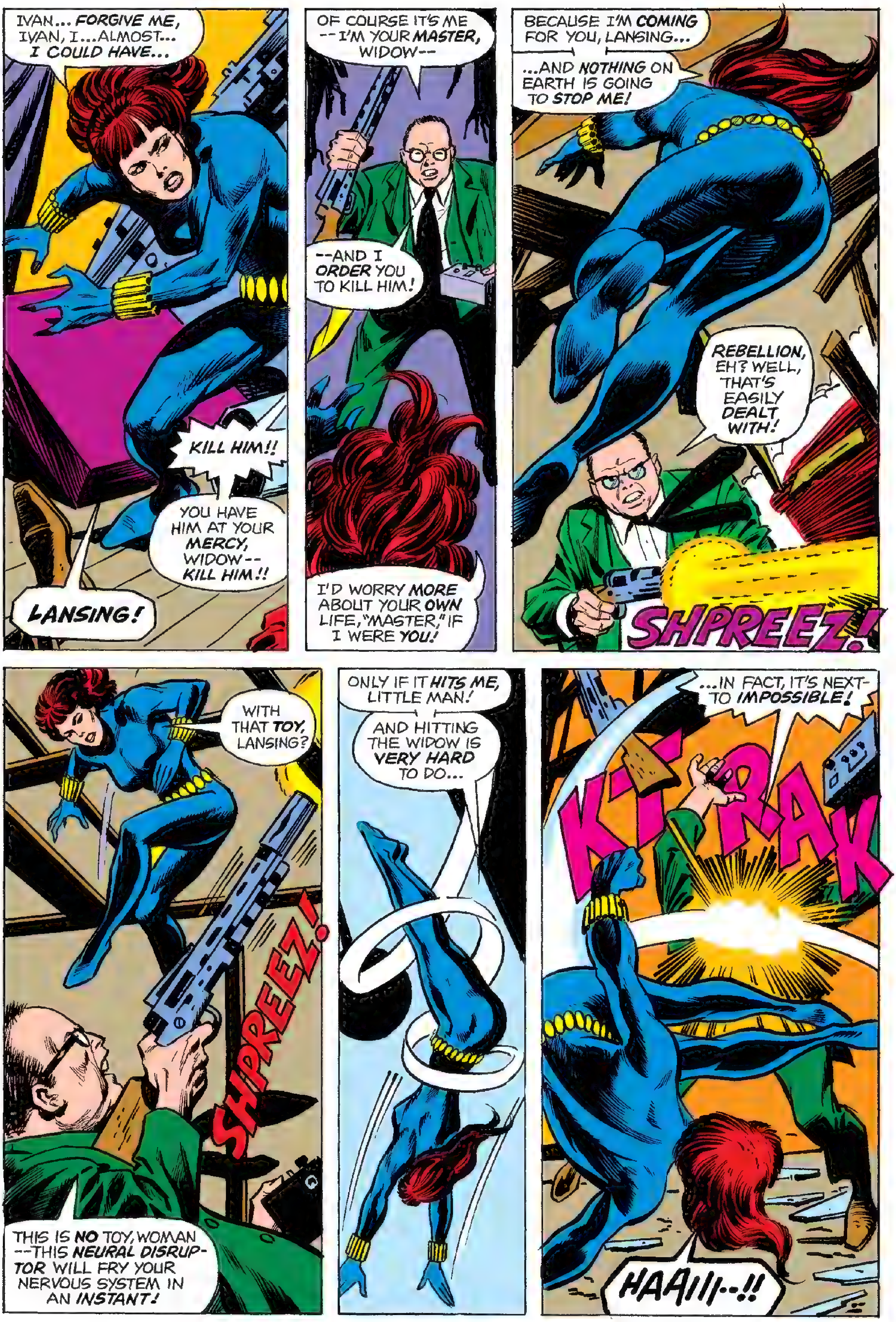

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S **GOIN' DOWN,** LADY...
...BUT IF YOU WANT TO CLIP **THIS** MUTANT'S WINGS...
...YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO DO A WHOLE LOT **BETTER** THAN THAT!
AND THE SAME GOES FOR **ICEMAN,** OLYMPIAN!
LET'S SEE YOU TRY AND **PUNCH ME OUT** ON ONE OF MY PATENTED **ICE SLIDES...**
SKROM!
I DIDN'T **THINK** YOU COULD DO IT, BIG MAN.
NICE TALK, MR. DRAKE--BUT THAT LITTLE NUMBER JUST LEFT YOU **WIDE-OPEN** FOR HERC'S HAIRY **PLAYMATES...**
...AND THESE CLOWNS ARE DEFINITELY **OUT FOR BLOOD!**
SLAY HIM--
--SLAY THE BEARDLESS YOUTH!!
HOLD ON, KID--FOR GOD'S SAKE, **HOLD ON!!**
I'LL GET YOU **OUTTA** THERE!
SOK!
BUT HOW, IVAN, **HOW--?** THESE HAIRIES'RE **SWARMIN'** ALL OVER THE HOUSE...
...KNOCK ONE DOWN, **TWO MORE** JUMP TO TAKE HIS **PLACE.**
DON'T SWEAT IT, IVAN--
--IT'LL TAKE A LOT **MORE** THAN THESE DODOS TO **WHOMP** THE ICEMAN--!
HECK, MAN, I KNEW A **DANGER ROOM** ONCE THAT WAS MORE **HASSLE** THAN THIS!

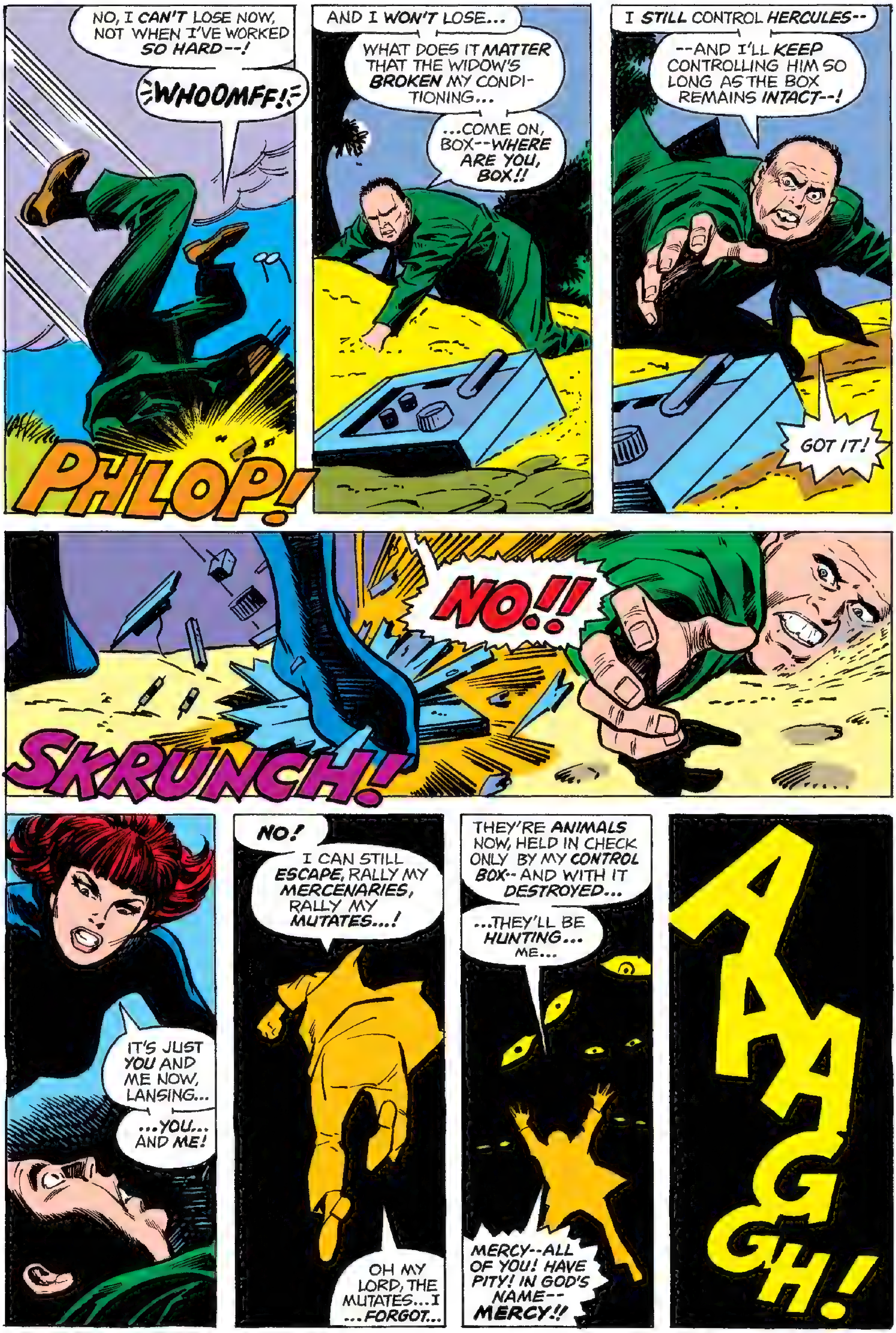

WAY TO GO, FELLA--IT SHOULDN'T TAKE MORE'N A COUPLE OF ICE BLASTS TO PUT THESE HAIRES TO BED.
THOU STILL MUST DEAL WITH ME, YOUTH!
HUH--?!
AND THOU CANST NOT!
PAKOW!
HERCULES--! DIDN'T SEE HIM COMING--!
EXCELLENT, MY BRAIN-SCRAMBLED IMMORTAL, EXCELLENT.
YOU AND THE WIDOW ARE PERFORMING BETTER THAN I'D HOPED...
FEEL LIKE MUSH INSIDE...MUZZY...BUT I CAN'T GIVE UP NOW ...I...CAN'T...
HOLD THE YOUTH, MY MUTATES--LET HERCULES ADMINISTER THE COUP DE GRÂCE...
...FOR THE MOMENT HERCULES AND THE BLACK WIDOW KILL THEIR FRIENDS...THEN, WILL MY CONDITIONING BE COMPLETE...
...AND THEY WILL BE MY SLAVES FOREVER--EH??!
VVMM
THAT NOISE--COMING FROM BEYOND THE DUNE--!
THE MAN'S NAME IS BLAZE, JOHNNY BLAZE...
...BETTER KNOWN, PERHAPS, AS...THE GHOST RIDER!
VVRRMMM
WITH GOOD REASON.
WHAT THE--?!
THOSE MEN--THINGS--GATHERED OUTSIDE ANGEL'S HOUSE...
WHATEVER THIS IS, IT MUST BE BAD NEWS, 'CAUSE I CAN FEEL MYSELF STARTIN' TO CHANGE--!
IF IT'S A FIGHT YOU CREEPS WANT...
...THEN THE GHOST RIDER'LL BE GLAD TO GIVE YOU ONE!

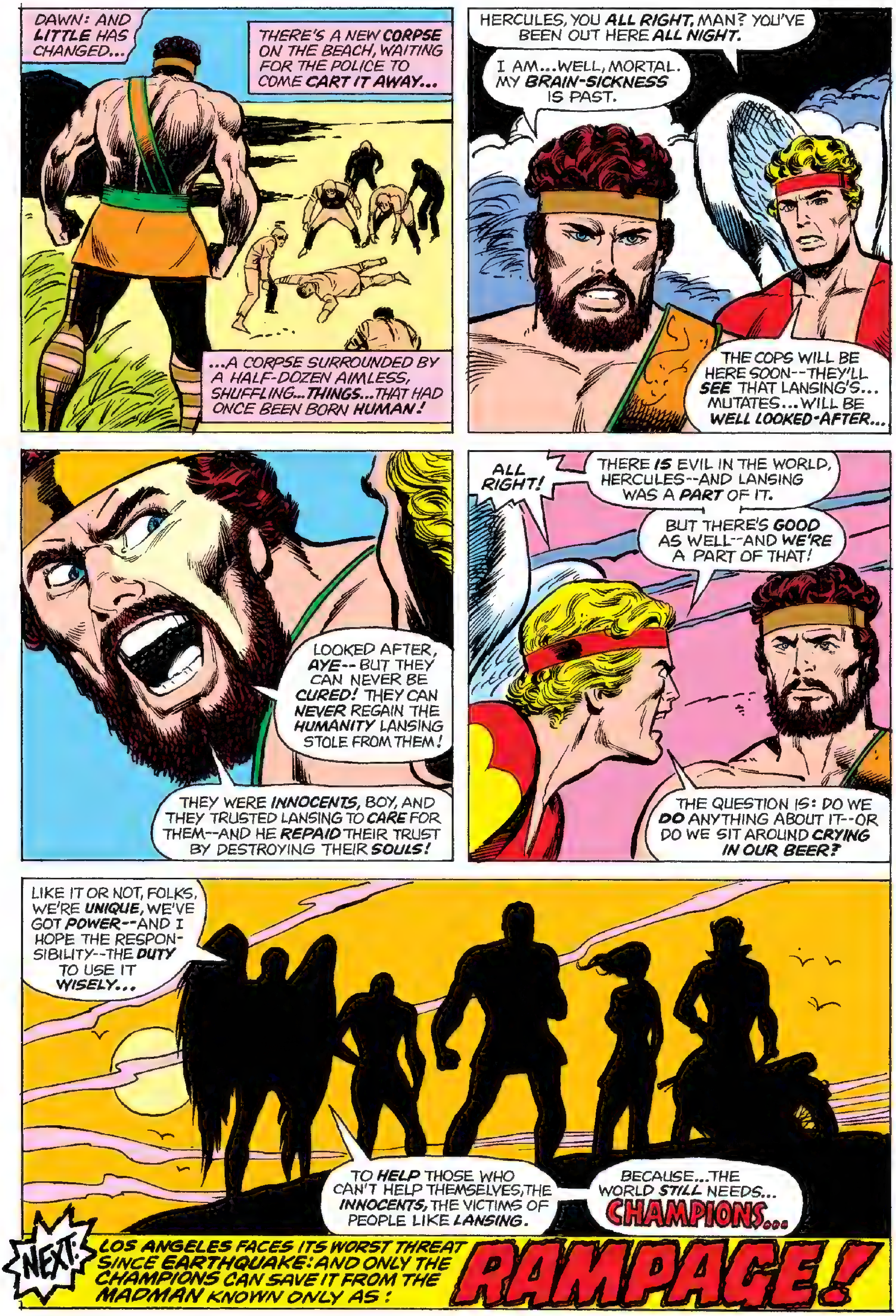

NICE **TALK**, BLAZE--
--BUT HOW 'BOUT PUTTIN' YOUR **MONEY** WHERE YOUR **MOUTH** IS FOR ONCE, BEFORE WE ALL GET **CREAMED**?
BROOM!
HUH? THE ANGEL AN' ICEMAN TACKLIN' **HERCULES...?**
WHAT **IS** GOING ON HERE, COWBOY?
THY **COURAGE** IS GREAT, MORTAL...
...BUT THEE AND THY **COMPANIONS** DOST FACE ONE WHO HAS STOOD **BLOW-TO-BLOW** WITH **THOR!**
LORD ABOVE-- HE TOOK MY **STRONGEST** BOLTS OF **HELLFIRE...**
...AND **SHRUGGED** THEM OFF AS IF THEY WERE **NOTHIN'!**
TRAKK!
FOR I AM HERCULES, PRINCE OF POWER!
AND THERE IS NO MORTAL **BORN** WHO CAN STAND AGAINST ME!!
HE'S **RIGHT**, BLAST IT--!
THIS LANSING DUDE'S GOT HIM **BRAINWASHED** INTO BELIEVING **WE'RE** THE BAD GUYS...
...AND HERC ISN'T GONNA **LET UP** UNTIL ALL OF US ARE **STONE COLD DEAD!**
SKRATAM!


MAYBE SO, ICEMAN--BUT IF **THIS** IS THE NIGHT WE'RE GONNA **DIE**..
LET'S **MAKE SURE** WE DIE LIKE **HEROES!**
PICTURE IT: THE **SCION OF ZEUS** TURNED AGAINST HIS FRIENDS, FACING **FIRE** ON ONE HAND, **ICE** ON THE OTHER, FACING ATTACK FROM THE **AIR**...
...FACING MEN WHO HAVE **BEATEN** SOME OF THE MOST **DEADLY VILLAINS** IN HISTORY...
...FACING ALMOST **INDESCRIBABLE** LEVELS OF RAW, UNBRIDLED **POWER**...
...AND STANDING **TRIUMPHANT** AGAINST THEM **ALL**.
IT'S A **BATTLE OUT OF LEGEND** FOUGHT THIS EVEN-TIDE ON A CHILL, WINTRY MALIBU BEACH ...A BATTLE FOR THE **LIVES** OF MAN, AND THE **SOUL** OF ONE...A BATTLE THAT CAN ONLY END IN **TRAGEDY**...


AS MIGHT THIS ONE...
GOT YOU, YA FUZZY-FACED TERROR...
BAK!
...AN', AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, YOU'RE THE LAST!
NOT THE LAST, MY FRIEND...
...YOU FORGOT THE BLACK WIDOW!
NATASHA--!
WHUK!
LITTLE TSARINA, IT'S ME, IVAN!
NO USE--SHE DON'T KNOW ME. AN' THAT LIGHTNING KICK'LL TAKE MY HEAD OFF IF IT CONNECTS...
...IF IT CONNECTS.
SCORE ONE FOR THE OLD GUY!
NO! SHE TURNED MY PARRY AGAINST ME...
...SHE'S COMIN' IN TOO FAST TO BLOCK--!
THOK!
THE MASTER WANTS YOU DEAD, FRIEND...
KRAK!
...AND THE BLACK WIDOW IS HERE TO SEE THAT THE MASTER GETS WHAT HE WANTS!
NATASHA... LITTLE TSARINA ...DON'T DO THIS... CHOKING ME... I BEG...YOU...
'TASHA...PLEASE...
NOTHING PERSONAL, FRIEND...
...FRIEND...?
YOU...ARE A FRIEND...MY MIND, BURNING AS IF IT'S ON FIRE INSIDE... CAN'T...THINK...
BUT I KNOW YOU, DON'T I? YOU...YOU'RE...
...IVAN...?
OH MY GOD, WHAT HAVE I DONE?


IVAN... FORGIVE ME, IVAN, I...ALMOST... I COULD HAVE...
KILL HIM!!
YOU HAVE HIM AT YOUR MERCY, WIDOW-- KILL HIM!!
LANSING!
OF COURSE IT'S ME -- I'M YOUR MASTER, WIDOW--
--AND I ORDER YOU TO KILL HIM!
I'D WORRY MORE ABOUT YOUR OWN LIFE, "MASTER," IF I WERE YOU!
BECAUSE I'M COMING FOR YOU, LANSING...
...AND NOTHING ON EARTH IS GOING TO STOP ME!
REBELLION, EH? WELL, THAT'S EASILY DEALT WITH!
SHPREEZ!
WITH THAT TOY, LANSING?
SHPREEZ!
THIS IS NO TOY, WOMAN --THIS NEURAL DISRUPTOR WILL FRY YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM IN AN INSTANT!
ONLY IF IT HITS ME, LITTLE MAN!
AND HITTING THE WIDOW IS VERY HARD TO DO...
...IN FACT, IT'S NEXT-TO IMPOSSIBLE!
K-TRAK
HAAIII--!!


NO, I CAN'T LOSE NOW, NOT WHEN I'VE WORKED SO HARD--!
WHOOMFF!
PHLOP!
AND I WON'T LOSE...
WHAT DOES IT MATTER THAT THE WIDOW'S BROKEN MY CONDITIONING...
...COME ON, BOX--WHERE ARE YOU, BOX!!
I STILL CONTROL HERCULES--
--AND I'LL KEEP CONTROLLING HIM SO LONG AS THE BOX REMAINS INTACT--!
GOT IT!
NO!!
SKRUNCH!
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME NOW, LANSING...
...YOU... AND ME!
NO!
I CAN STILL ESCAPE, RALLY MY MERCENARIES, RALLY MY MUTATES...!
OH MY LORD, THE MUTATES... I ...FORGOT...
THEY'RE ANIMALS NOW, HELD IN CHECK ONLY BY MY CONTROL BOX-- AND WITH IT DESTROYED...
...THEY'LL BE HUNTING... ME...
MERCY--ALL OF YOU! HAVE PITY! IN GOD'S NAME-- MERCY!!
AAAGGH!


DAWN: AND **LITTLE** HAS CHANGED...
THERE'S A NEW **CORPSE** ON THE BEACH, WAITING FOR THE POLICE TO COME **CART IT AWAY...**
...A CORPSE SURROUNDED BY A HALF-DOZEN AIMLESS, SHUFFLING...**THINGS...**THAT HAD ONCE BEEN BORN **HUMAN!**
HERCULES, YOU **ALL RIGHT,** MAN? YOU'VE BEEN OUT HERE **ALL NIGHT.**
I AM...WELL, MORTAL. MY **BRAIN-SICKNESS** IS PAST.
THE COPS WILL BE HERE SOON--THEY'LL **SEE** THAT LANSING'S... MUTATES...WILL BE **WELL LOOKED-AFTER...**
LOOKED AFTER, **AYE**-- BUT THEY CAN NEVER BE **CURED!** THEY CAN **NEVER** REGAIN THE **HUMANITY** LANSING STOLE FROM THEM!
THEY WERE **INNOCENTS,** BOY, AND THEY TRUSTED LANSING TO **CARE** FOR THEM--AND HE **REPAID** THEIR TRUST BY DESTROYING THEIR **SOULS!**
ALL RIGHT!
THERE **IS** EVIL IN THE WORLD, HERCULES--AND LANSING WAS A **PART** OF IT.
BUT THERE'S **GOOD** AS WELL--AND **WE'RE** A PART OF THAT!
THE QUESTION IS: DO WE **DO** ANYTHING ABOUT IT--OR DO WE SIT AROUND **CRYING IN OUR BEER?**
LIKE IT OR NOT, FOLKS, WE'RE **UNIQUE,** WE'VE GOT **POWER**--AND I HOPE THE RESPONSIBILITY--THE **DUTY** TO USE IT **WISELY...**
TO **HELP** THOSE WHO CAN'T HELP THEMSELVES, THE **INNOCENTS,** THE VICTIMS OF PEOPLE LIKE **LANSING.**
BECAUSE...THE WORLD **STILL** NEEDS... CHAMPIONS...
NEXT:
LOS ANGELES FACES ITS WORST THREAT SINCE EARTHQUAKE: AND ONLY THE CHAMPIONS CAN SAVE IT FROM THE MADMAN KNOWN ONLY AS:
RAMPAGE!

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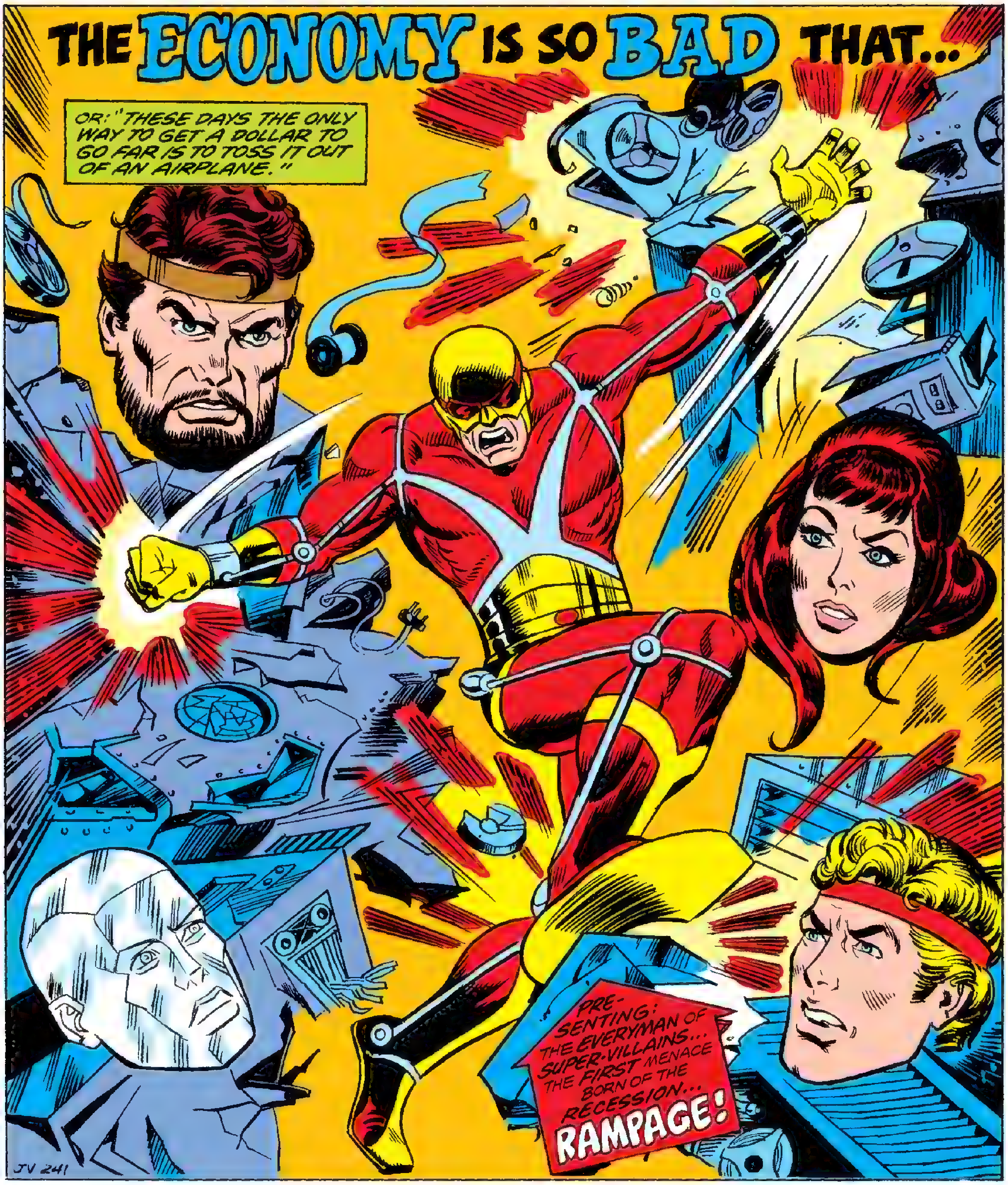
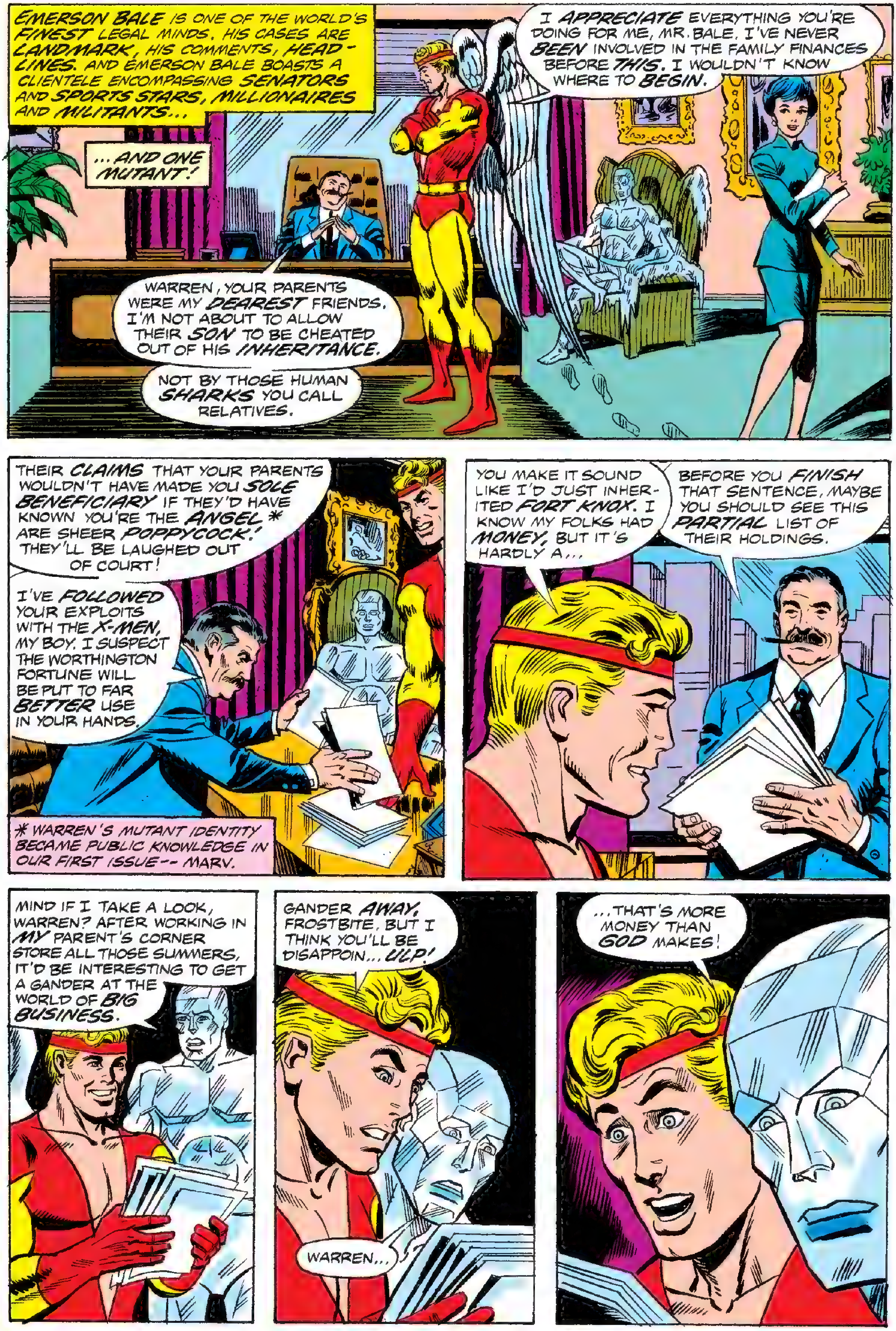
THE CHAMPIONS™
™
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MURDER IS A MAN CALLED... RAMPAGE!

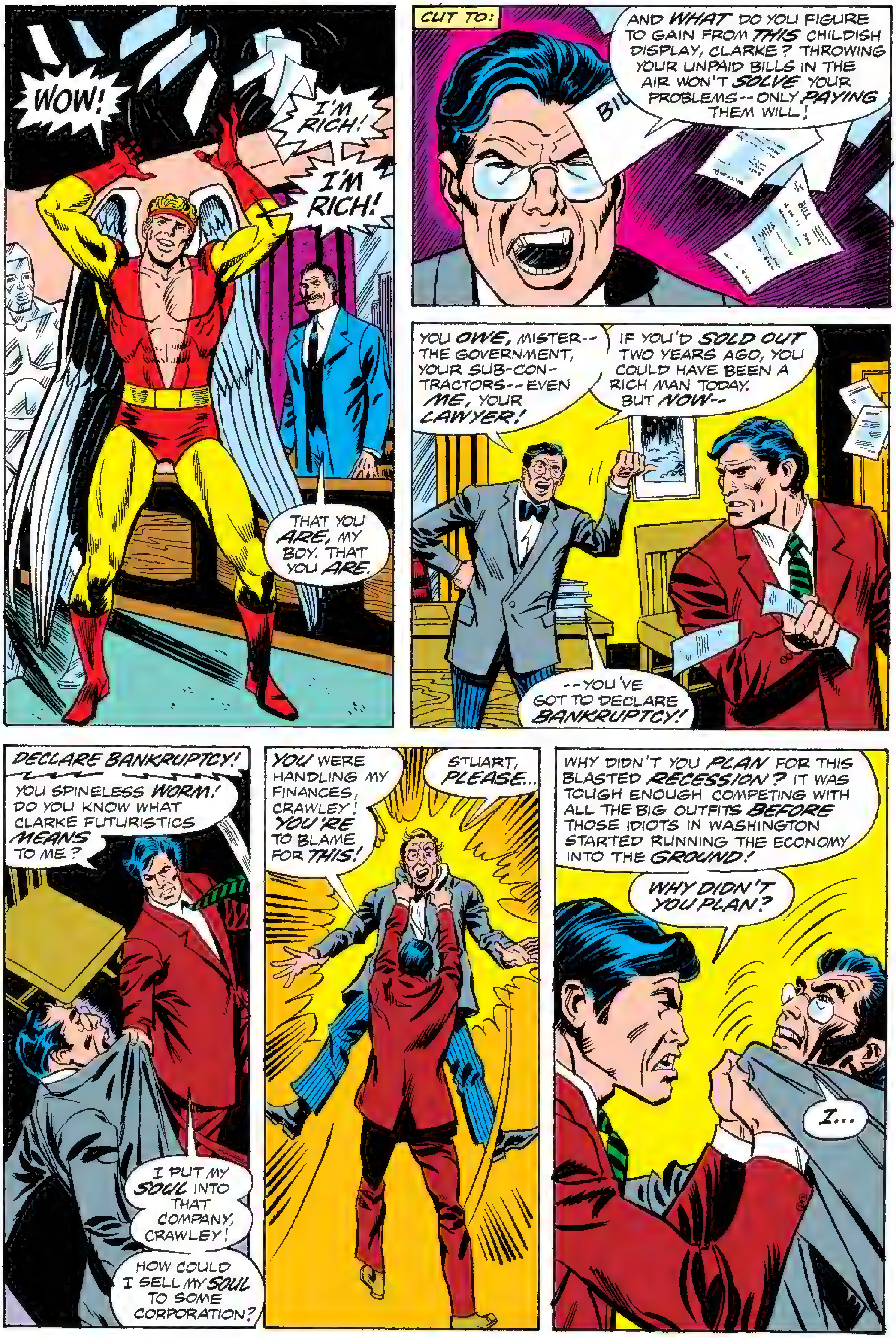
HERCULES, Prince of Power! **THE BLACK WIDOW,** beautiful but deadly! **THE GHOST RIDER,** the most super-natural super-hero of them all! **THE ANGEL** and **ICEMAN,** two former X-Men, each seeking a life of his own! They are brought together to fight mankind's greatest foes... because the world still needs heroes!

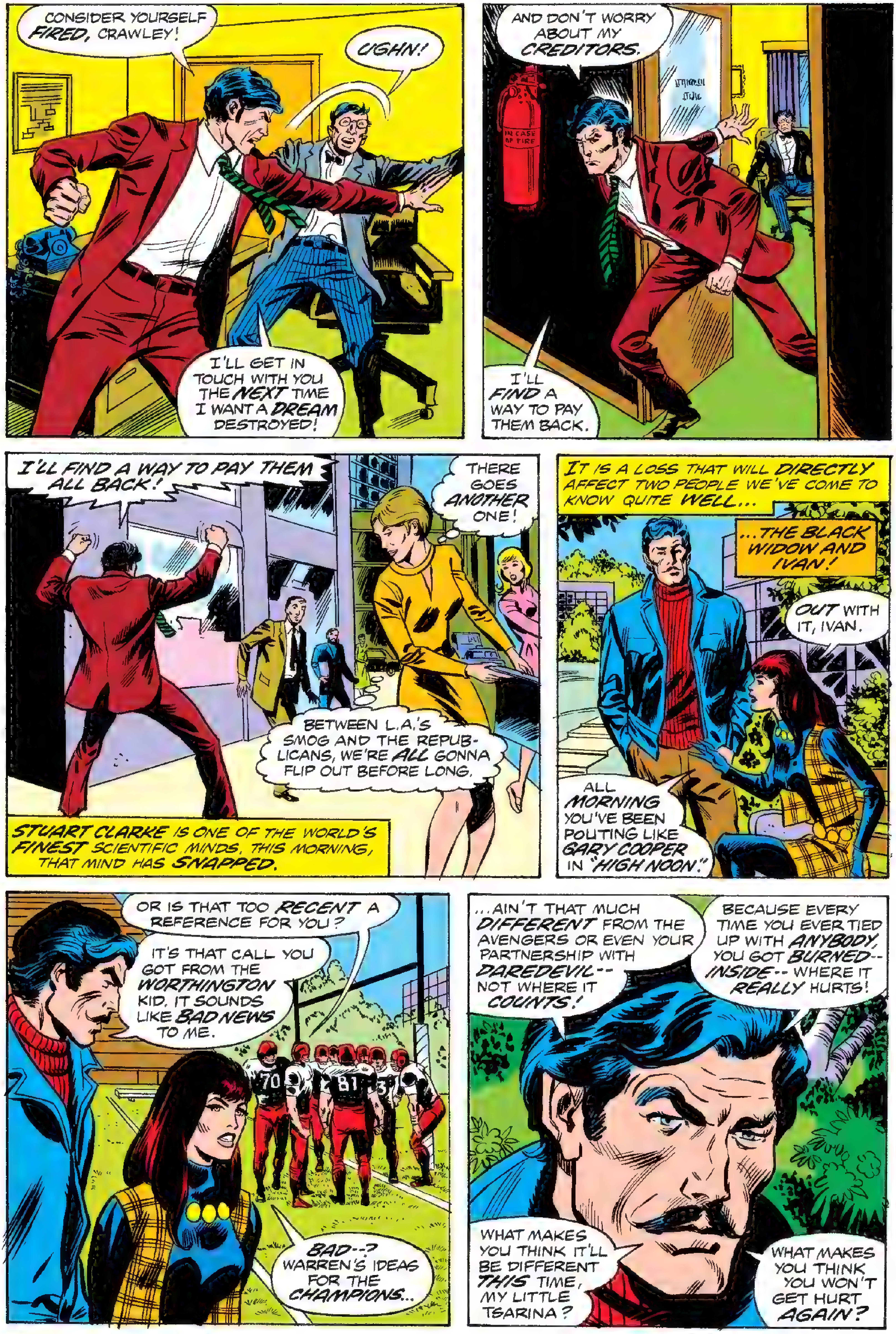
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE CHAMPIONS™

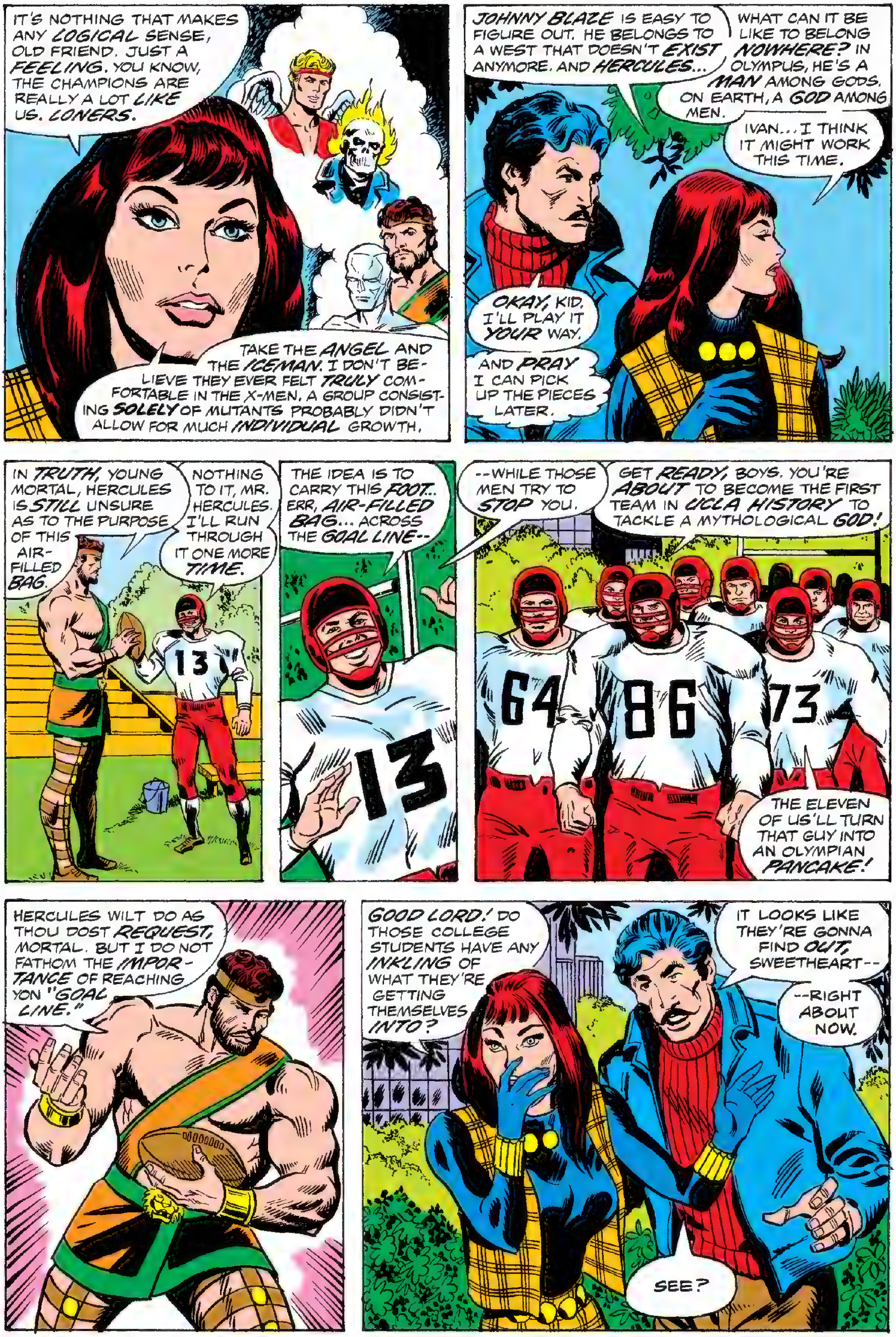
BACK TO THRILL MARVELDOM ANEW... TONY ISABELLA, WRITER • DON HECK & JOHN TARTAG, ARTISTS • J. COSTANZA, letterer • J. COHEN, colorist • MARV WOLFMAN, EDITOR

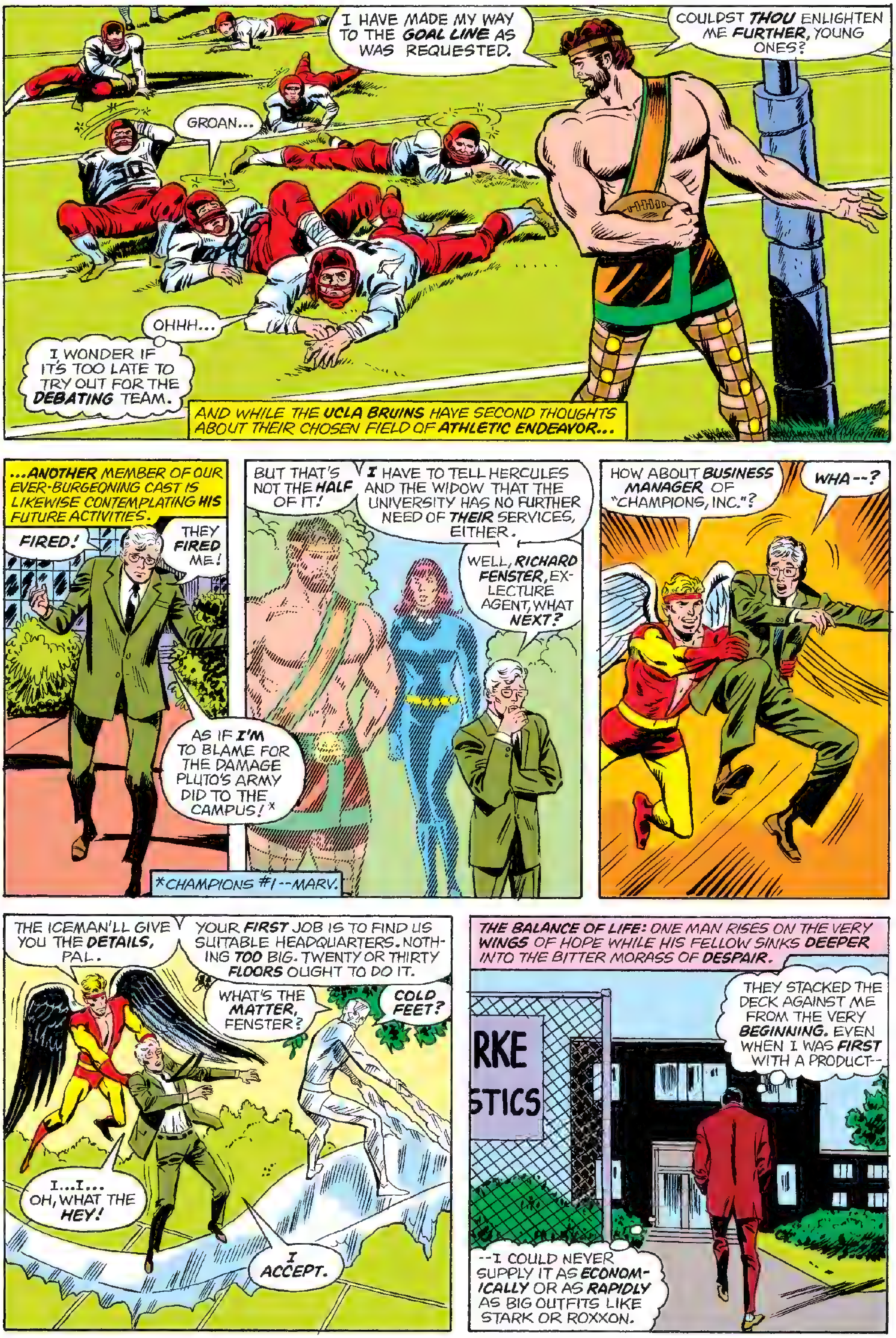

THE ECONOMY IS SO BAD THAT...
OR: "THESE DAYS THE ONLY WAY TO GET A DOLLAR TO GO FAR IS TO TOSS IT OUT OF AN AIRPLANE."
PRESENTING: THE EVERYMAN OF SUPER-VILLAINS... THE FIRST MENACE BORN OF THE RECESSION... RAMPAGE!
JV 241

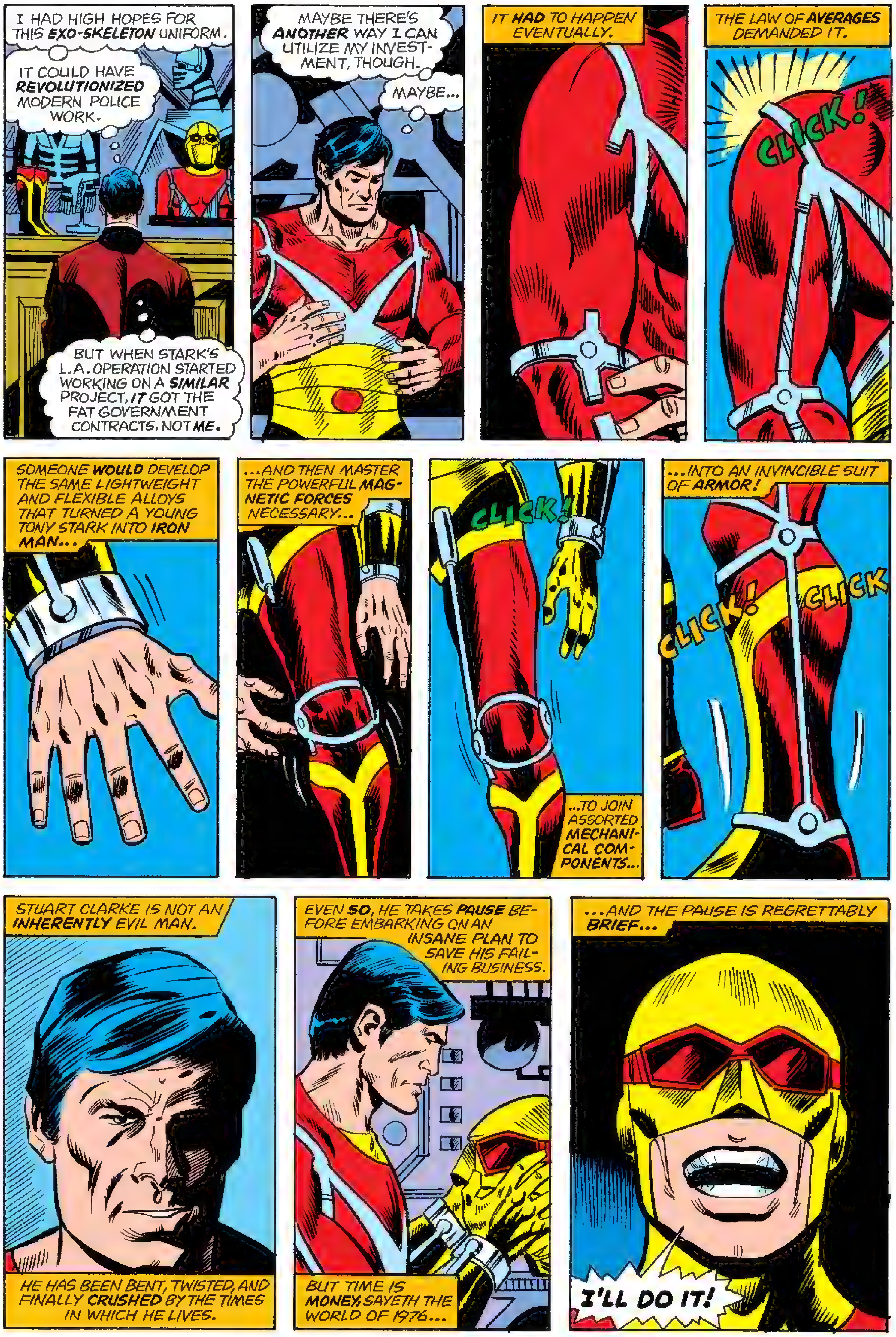

EMERSON BALE IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S FINEST LEGAL MINDS. HIS CASES ARE LANDMARK, HIS COMMENTS, HEADLINES. AND EMERSON BALE BOASTS A CLIENTELE ENCOMPASSING SENATORS AND SPORTS STARS, MILLIONAIRES AND MILITANTS...
...AND ONE MUTANT!
I APPRECIATE EVERYTHING YOU'RE DOING FOR ME, MR. BALE. I'VE NEVER BEEN INVOLVED IN THE FAMILY FINANCES BEFORE THIS. I WOULDN'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
WARREN, YOUR PARENTS WERE MY DEAREST FRIENDS. I'M NOT ABOUT TO ALLOW THEIR SON TO BE CHEATED OUT OF HIS INHERITANCE.
NOT BY THOSE HUMAN SHARKS YOU CALL RELATIVES.
THEIR CLAIMS THAT YOUR PARENTS WOULDN'T HAVE MADE YOU SOLE BENEFICIARY IF THEY'D HAVE KNOWN YOU'RE THE ANGEL* ARE SHEER POPPYCOCK! THEY'LL BE LAUGHED OUT OF COURT!
I'VE FOLLOWED YOUR EXPLOITS WITH THE X-MEN, MY BOY. I SUSPECT THE WORTHINGTON FORTUNE WILL BE PUT TO FAR BETTER USE IN YOUR HANDS.
*WARREN'S MUTANT IDENTITY BECAME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE IN OUR FIRST ISSUE-- MARV.
YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE I'D JUST INHERITED FORT KNOX. I KNOW MY FOLKS HAD MONEY, BUT IT'S HARDLY A...
BEFORE YOU FINISH THAT SENTENCE, MAYBE YOU SHOULD SEE THIS PARTIAL LIST OF THEIR HOLDINGS.
MIND IF I TAKE A LOOK, WARREN? AFTER WORKING IN MY PARENT'S CORNER STORE ALL THOSE SUMMERS, IT'D BE INTERESTING TO GET A GANDER AT THE WORLD OF BIG BUSINESS.
GANDER AWAY, FROSTBITE. BUT I THINK YOU'LL BE DISAPPOIN... ULP!
WARREN...
...THAT'S MORE MONEY THAN GOD MAKES!

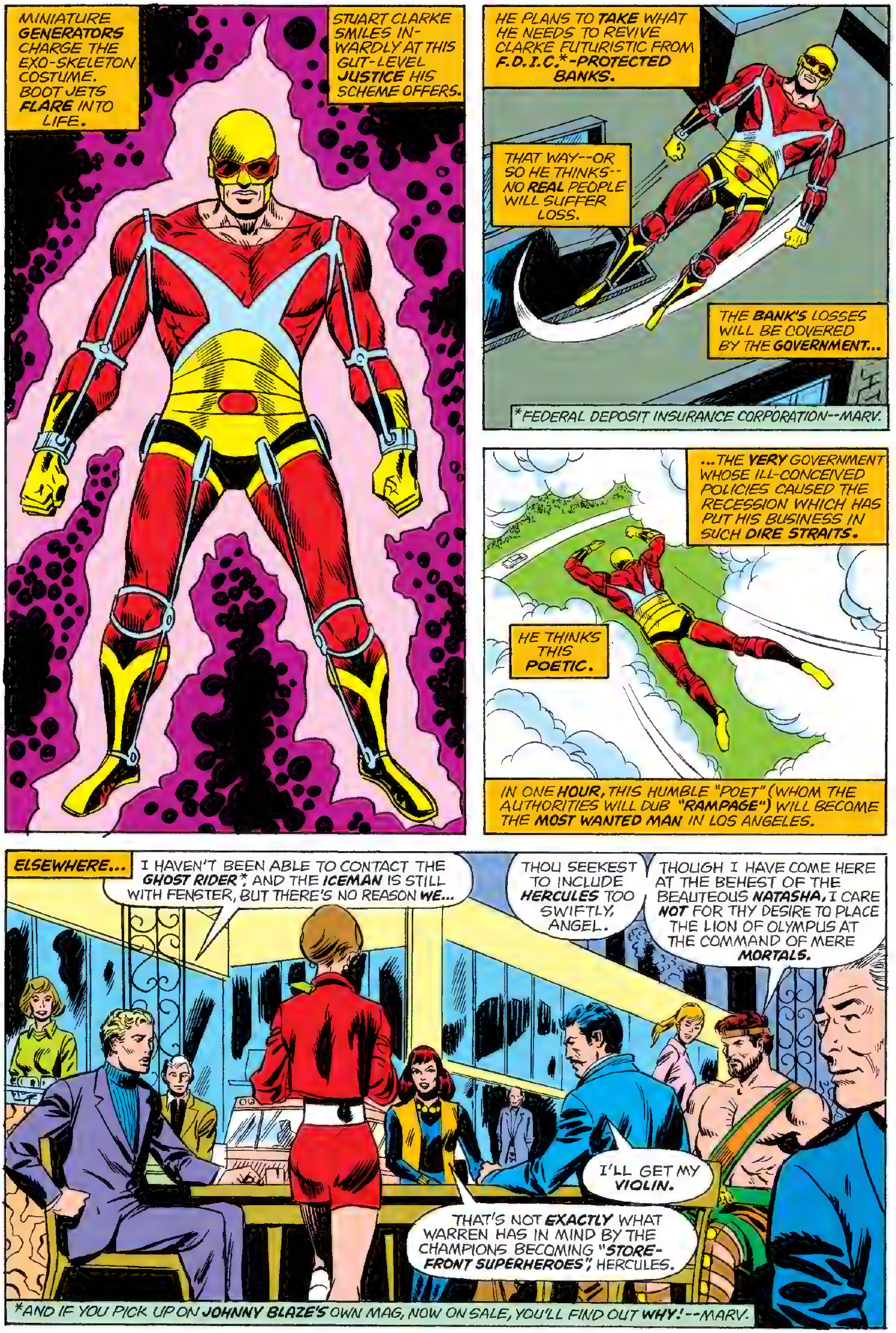

WOW!
I'M RICH!
I'M RICH!
THAT YOU ARE, MY BOY. THAT YOU ARE.
CUT TO:
AND WHAT DO YOU FIGURE TO GAIN FROM THIS CHILDISH DISPLAY, CLARKE? THROWING YOUR UNPAID BILLS IN THE AIR WON'T SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS-- ONLY PAYING THEM WILL!
BILL
YOU OWE, MISTER-- THE GOVERNMENT, YOUR SUB-CONTRACTORS-- EVEN ME, YOUR LAWYER!
IF YOU'D SOLD OUT TWO YEARS AGO, YOU COULD HAVE BEEN A RICH MAN TODAY. BUT NOW--
--YOU'VE GOT TO DECLARE BANKRUPTCY!
DECLARE BANKRUPTCY!
YOU SPINELESS WORM! DO YOU KNOW WHAT CLARKE FUTURISTICS MEANS TO ME?
I PUT MY SOUL INTO THAT COMPANY, CRAWLEY!
HOW COULD I SELL MY SOUL TO SOME CORPORATION?
YOU WERE HANDLING MY FINANCES, CRAWLEY! YOU'RE TO BLAME FOR THIS!
STUART, PLEASE...
WHY DIDN'T YOU PLAN FOR THIS BLASTED RECESSION? IT WAS TOUGH ENOUGH COMPETING WITH ALL THE BIG OUTFITS BEFORE THOSE IDIOTS IN WASHINGTON STARTED RUNNING THE ECONOMY INTO THE GROUND!
WHY DIDN'T YOU PLAN?
I...

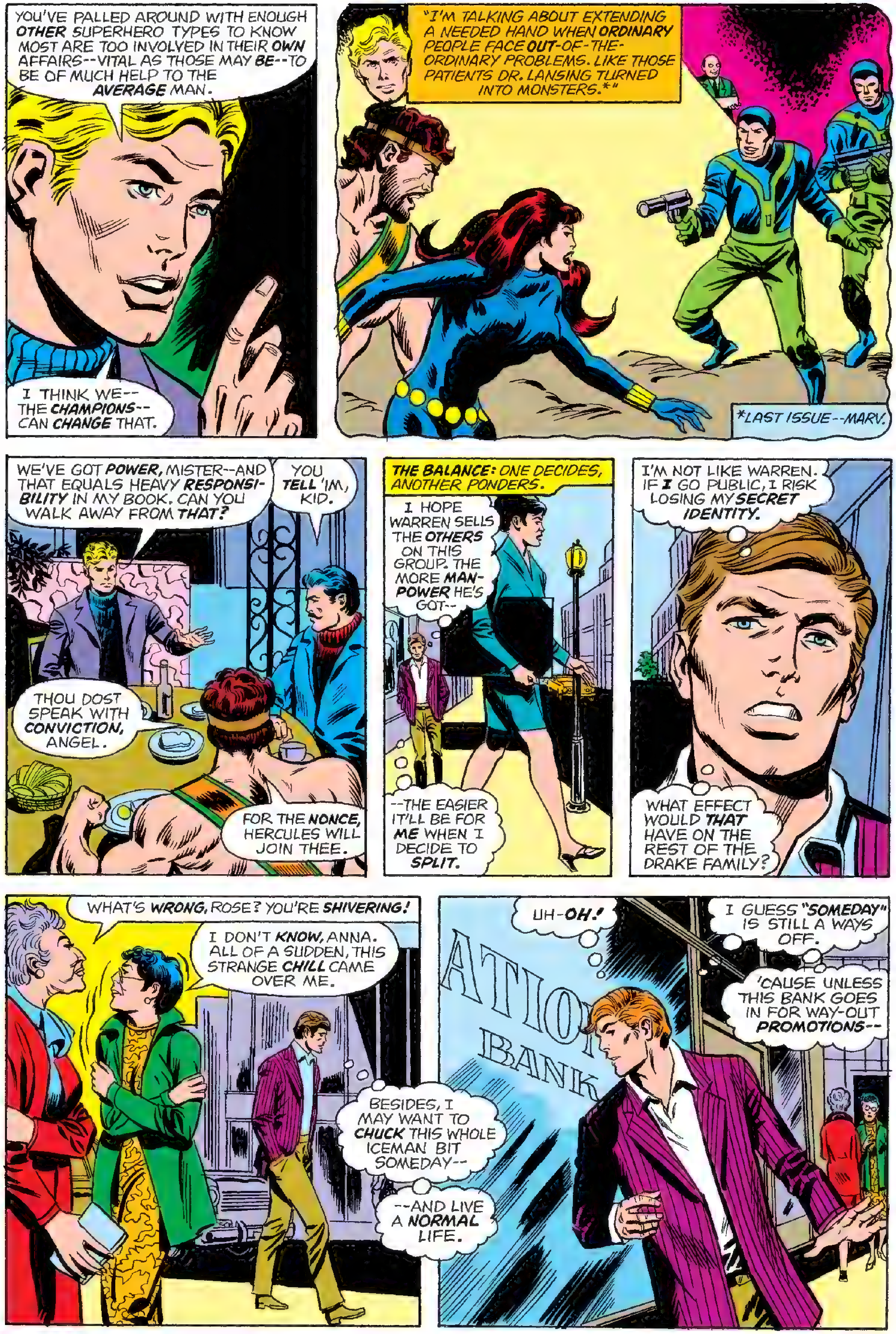

CONSIDER YOURSELF *FIRED*, CRAWLEY!
UGHN!
I'LL GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU THE *NEXT* TIME I WANT A *DREAM* DESTROYED!
AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT MY *CREDITORS*.
IN CASE OF FIRE
I'LL *FIND* A WAY TO PAY THEM BACK.
I'LL FIND A WAY TO PAY THEM ALL BACK!
THERE GOES *ANOTHER* ONE!
BETWEEN L.A.'S SMOG AND THE REPUBLICANS, WE'RE *ALL* GONNA FLIP OUT BEFORE LONG.
STUART CLARKE IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S *FINEST* SCIENTIFIC MINDS. THIS MORNING, THAT MIND HAS *SNAPPED*.
IT IS A LOSS THAT WILL DIRECTLY AFFECT TWO PEOPLE WE'VE COME TO KNOW QUITE WELL...
...THE BLACK WIDOW AND IVAN!
OUT WITH IT, IVAN.
ALL *MORNING* YOU'VE BEEN POUTING LIKE *GARY COOPER* IN "*HIGH NOON*."
OR IS THAT TOO *RECENT* A REFERENCE FOR YOU?
IT'S THAT CALL YOU GOT FROM THE *WORTHINGTON* KID. IT SOUNDS LIKE *BAD NEWS* TO ME.
70
81
31
BAD--? WARREN'S IDEAS FOR THE *CHAMPIONS*...
...AIN'T THAT MUCH *DIFFERENT* FROM THE AVENGERS OR EVEN YOUR PARTNERSHIP WITH *DAREDEVIL*-- NOT WHERE IT *COUNTS*!
BECAUSE EVERY TIME YOU EVER TIED UP WITH *ANYBODY*, YOU GOT *BURNED*-- *INSIDE*-- WHERE IT *REALLY* HURTS!
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK IT'LL BE DIFFERENT *THIS* TIME, MY LITTLE TSARINA?
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU WON'T GET HURT *AGAIN*?

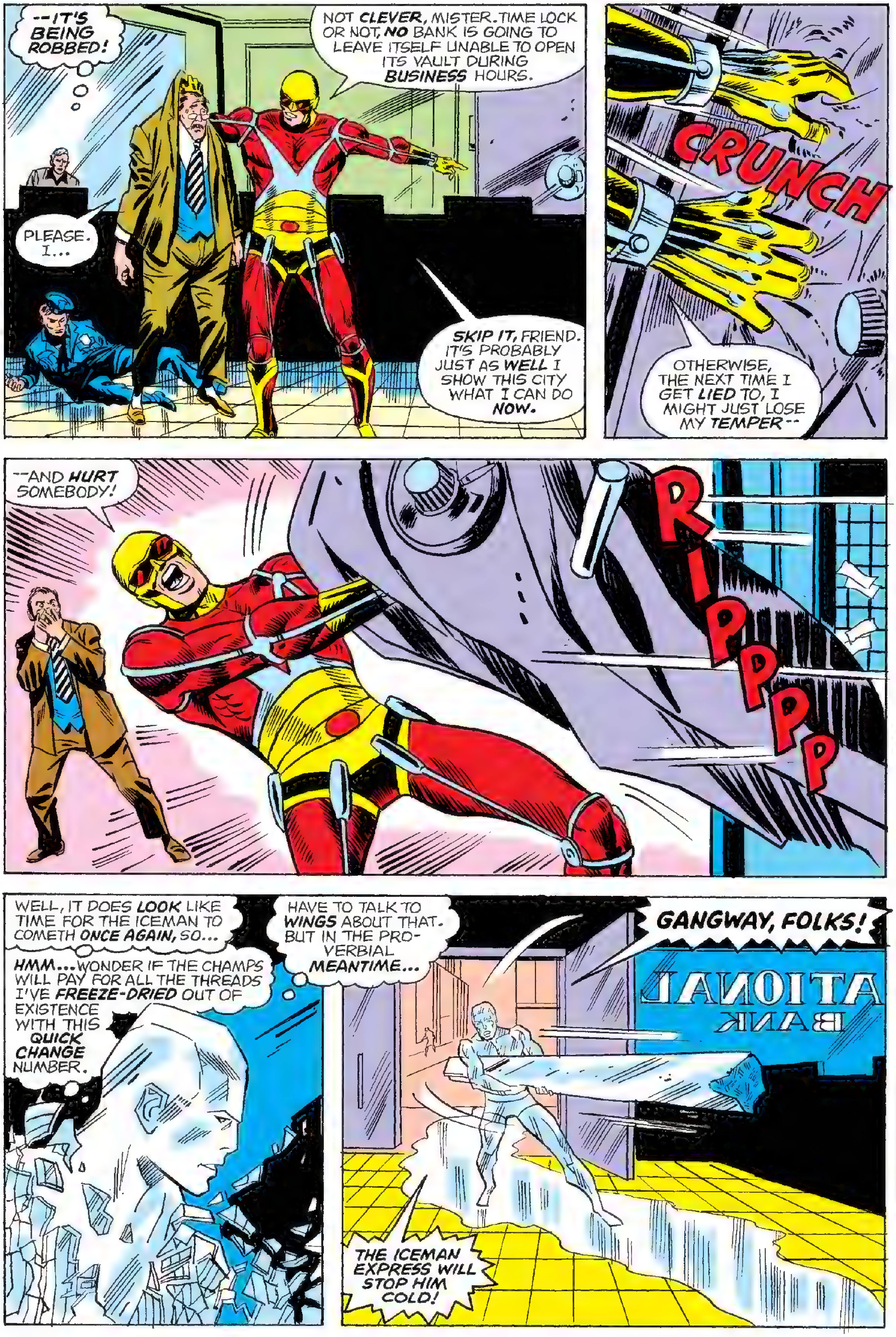

IT'S NOTHING THAT MAKES ANY *LOGICAL* SENSE, OLD FRIEND. JUST A *FEELING*. YOU KNOW, THE CHAMPIONS ARE REALLY A LOT *LIKE* US. *LONERS*.
TAKE THE *ANGEL* AND THE *ICEMAN*. I DON'T BELIEVE THEY EVER FELT *TRULY* COMFORTABLE IN THE X-MEN. A GROUP CONSISTING *SOLELY* OF MUTANTS PROBABLY DIDN'T ALLOW FOR MUCH *INDIVIDUAL* GROWTH.
JOHNNY BLAZE IS EASY TO FIGURE OUT. HE BELONGS TO A WEST THAT DOESN'T *EXIST* ANYMORE. AND *HERCULES*...
WHAT CAN IT BE LIKE TO BELONG *NOWHERE?* IN OLYMPUS, HE'S A *MAN* AMONG GODS. ON EARTH, A *GOD* AMONG MEN.
IVAN... I THINK IT MIGHT WORK THIS TIME.
OKAY, KID. I'LL PLAY IT *YOUR* WAY.
AND *PRAY* I CAN PICK UP THE PIECES LATER.
IN *TRUTH*, YOUNG MORTAL, HERCULES IS *STILL* UNSURE AS TO THE PURPOSE OF THIS AIR-FILLED *BAG*.
NOTHING TO IT, MR. HERCULES. I'LL RUN THROUGH IT ONE MORE *TIME*.
THE IDEA IS TO CARRY THIS *FOOT*... ERR, *AIR-FILLED BAG*... ACROSS THE *GOAL LINE*--
--WHILE THOSE MEN TRY TO *STOP* YOU.
GET *READY*, BOYS. YOU'RE *ABOUT* TO BECOME THE FIRST TEAM IN *UCLA HISTORY* TO TACKLE A MYTHOLOGICAL *GOD!*
THE ELEVEN OF US'LL TURN THAT GUY INTO AN OLYMPIAN *PANCAKE!*
HERCULES WILT DO AS THOU DOST *REQUEST*, MORTAL. BUT I DO NOT FATHOM THE *IMPORTANCE* OF REACHING YON "*GOAL LINE*."
GOOD LORD! DO THOSE COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE ANY *INKLING* OF WHAT THEY'RE GETTING THEMSELVES *INTO?*
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GONNA FIND *OUT*, SWEETHEART--
--RIGHT ABOUT NOW.
SEE?

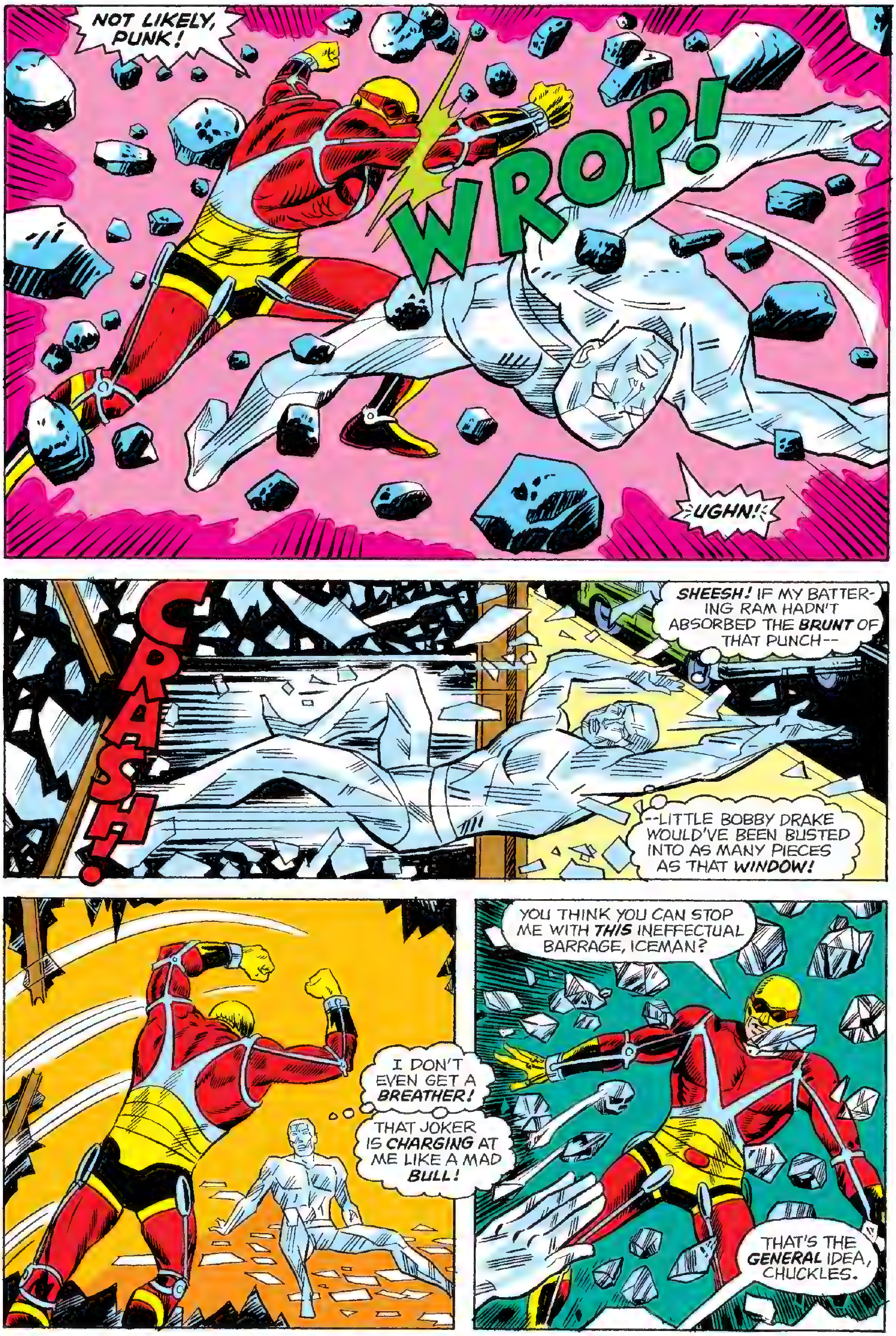

I HAVE MADE MY WAY TO THE **GOAL LINE** AS WAS REQUESTED.
COULDST **THOU** ENLIGHTEN ME **FURTHER**, YOUNG ONES?
GROAN...
OHHH...
I WONDER IF IT'S TOO LATE TO TRY OUT FOR THE **DEBATING** TEAM.
30
AND WHILE THE **UCLA BRUINS** HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THEIR CHOSEN FIELD OF **ATHLETIC ENDEAVOR...**
...ANOTHER MEMBER OF OUR EVER-BURGEONING CAST IS LIKEWISE CONTEMPLATING **HIS** FUTURE ACTIVITIES.
FIRED!
THEY **FIRED** ME!
AS IF **I'M** TO BLAME FOR THE DAMAGE PLUTO'S ARMY DID TO THE CAMPUS!*
BUT THAT'S NOT THE **HALF** OF IT!
I HAVE TO TELL HERCULES AND THE WIDOW THAT THE UNIVERSITY HAS NO FURTHER NEED OF **THEIR** SERVICES, EITHER.
WELL, **RICHARD FENSTER**, EX-LECTURE AGENT, WHAT **NEXT?**
*CHAMPIONS #1--MARV.
HOW ABOUT **BUSINESS MANAGER** OF "CHAMPIONS, INC."?
WHA--?
THE ICEMAN'LL GIVE YOU THE **DETAILS**, PAL.
YOUR **FIRST** JOB IS TO FIND US SUITABLE HEADQUARTERS. NOTHING **TOO** BIG. TWENTY OR THIRTY **FLOORS** OUGHT TO DO IT.
WHAT'S THE **MATTER**, FENSTER?
COLD FEET?
I...I... OH, WHAT THE **HEY!**
I ACCEPT.
THE BALANCE OF LIFE: ONE MAN RISES ON THE VERY **WINGS** OF HOPE WHILE HIS FELLOW SINKS **DEEPER** INTO THE BITTER MORASS OF **DESPAIR**.
RKE
STICS
THEY STACKED THE DECK AGAINST ME FROM THE VERY **BEGINNING**. EVEN WHEN I WAS **FIRST** WITH A PRODUCT--
--I COULD NEVER SUPPLY IT AS **ECONOMICALLY** OR AS **RAPIDLY** AS BIG OUTFITS LIKE STARK OR ROXXON.

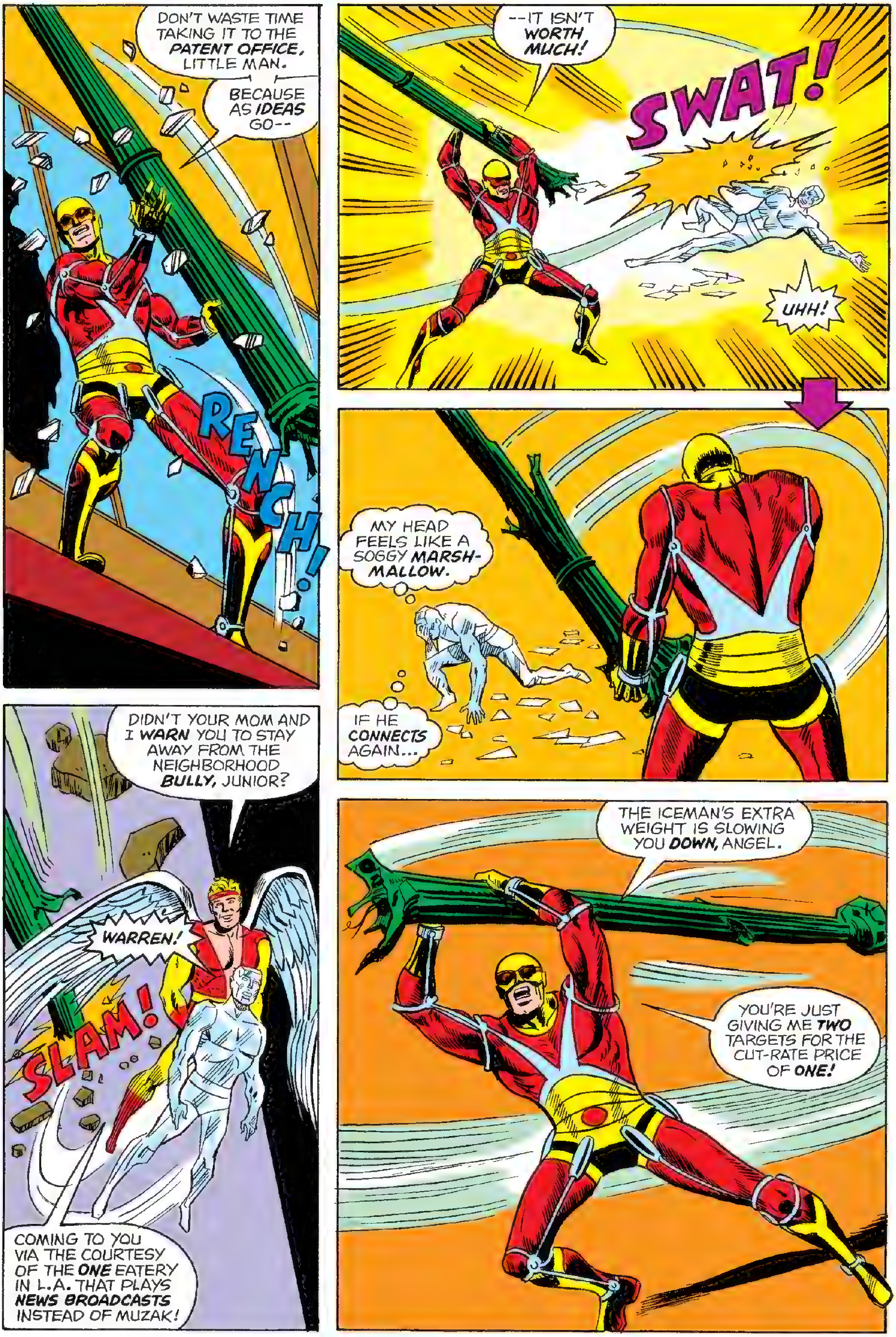

I HAD HIGH HOPES FOR THIS EXO-SKELETON UNIFORM.
IT COULD HAVE REVOLUTIONIZED MODERN POLICE WORK.
BUT WHEN STARK'S L.A. OPERATION STARTED WORKING ON A SIMILAR PROJECT, IT GOT THE FAT GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS, NOT ME.
MAYBE THERE'S ANOTHER WAY I CAN UTILIZE MY INVESTMENT, THOUGH.
MAYBE...
IT HAD TO HAPPEN EVENTUALLY.
THE LAW OF AVERAGES DEMANDED IT.
CLICK!
SOMEONE WOULD DEVELOP THE SAME LIGHTWEIGHT AND FLEXIBLE ALLOYS THAT TURNED A YOUNG TONY STARK INTO IRON MAN...
...AND THEN MASTER THE POWERFUL MAGNETIC FORCES NECESSARY...
CLICK!
...TO JOIN ASSORTED MECHANICAL COMPONENTS...
...INTO AN INVINCIBLE SUIT OF ARMOR!
CLICK!
CLICK
STUART CLARKE IS NOT AN INHERENTLY EVIL MAN.
HE HAS BEEN BENT, TWISTED, AND FINALLY CRUSHED BY THE TIMES IN WHICH HE LIVES.
EVEN SO, HE TAKES PAUSE BEFORE EMBARKING ON AN INSANE PLAN TO SAVE HIS FAILING BUSINESS.
BUT TIME IS MONEY, SAYETH THE WORLD OF 1976...
...AND THE PAUSE IS REGRETTABLY BRIEF...
I'LL DO IT!

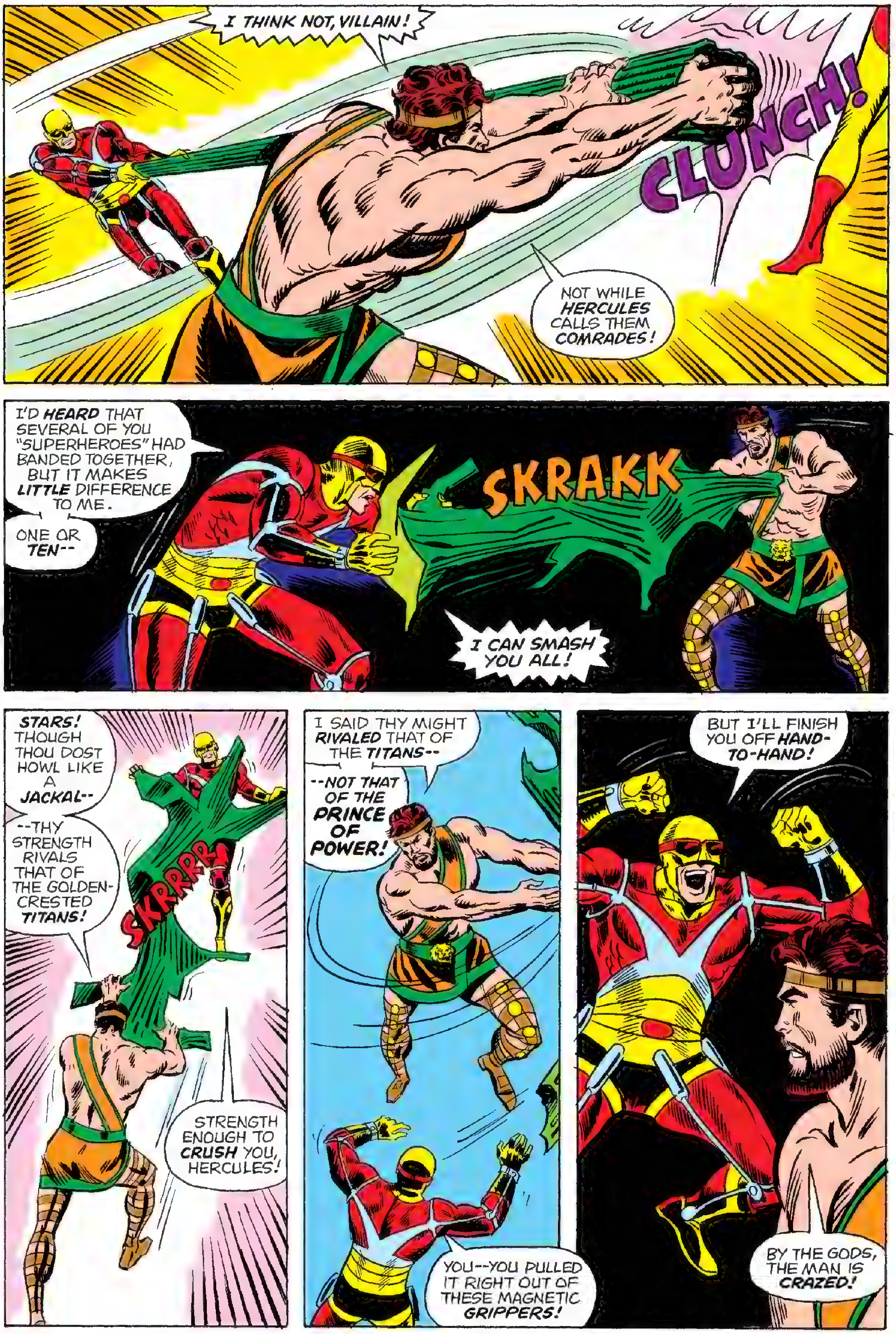

MINIATURE **GENERATORS** CHARGE THE EXO-SKELETON COSTUME. BOOT JETS **FLARE** INTO LIFE.
STUART CLARKE SMILES INWARDLY AT THIS GUT-LEVEL **JUSTICE** HIS SCHEME OFFERS.
HE PLANS TO **TAKE** WHAT HE NEEDS TO REVIVE CLARKE FUTURISTIC FROM **F.D.I.C.*-PROTECTED BANKS.**
THAT WAY--OR SO HE THINKS--NO **REAL** PEOPLE WILL SUFFER LOSS.
THE **BANK'S** LOSSES WILL BE COVERED BY THE **GOVERNMENT...**
*FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION--MARV.
...THE **VERY** GOVERNMENT WHOSE ILL-CONCEIVED POLICIES CAUSED THE RECESSION WHICH HAS PUT HIS BUSINESS IN SUCH **DIRE STRAITS.**
HE THINKS THIS **POETIC.**
IN ONE **HOUR,** THIS HUMBLE "POET" (WHOM THE AUTHORITIES WILL DUB **"RAMPAGE"**) WILL BECOME THE **MOST WANTED MAN** IN LOS ANGELES.
ELSEWHERE...
I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO CONTACT THE **GHOST RIDER***, AND THE **ICEMAN** IS STILL WITH FENSTER, BUT THERE'S NO REASON **WE...**
THOU SEEKEST TO INCLUDE **HERCULES** TOO SWIFTLY, ANGEL.
THOUGH I HAVE COME HERE AT THE BEHEST OF THE BEAUTEOUS **NATASHA,** I CARE **NOT** FOR THY DESIRE TO PLACE THE LION OF OLYMPUS AT THE COMMAND OF MERE **MORTALS.**
I'LL GET MY **VIOLIN.**
THAT'S NOT **EXACTLY** WHAT WARREN HAS IN MIND BY THE CHAMPIONS BECOMING **"STORE-FRONT SUPERHEROES"**, HERCULES.
*AND IF YOU PICK UP ON **JOHNNY BLAZE'S** OWN MAG, NOW ON SALE, YOU'LL FIND OUT **WHY!**--MARV.

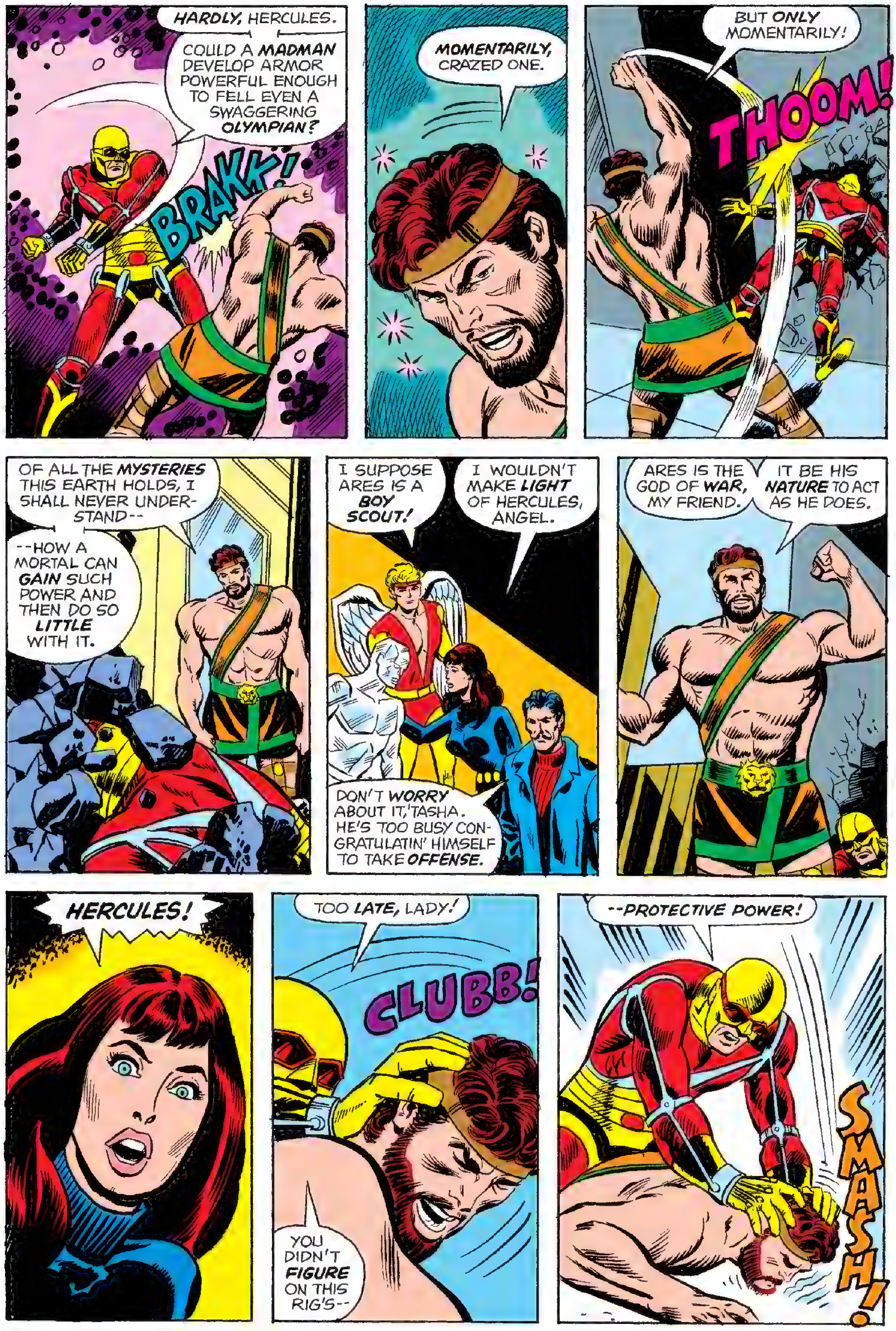

YOU'VE PALLED AROUND WITH ENOUGH OTHER SUPERHERO TYPES TO KNOW MOST ARE TOO INVOLVED IN THEIR OWN AFFAIRS--VITAL AS THOSE MAY BE--TO BE OF MUCH HELP TO THE AVERAGE MAN.
I THINK WE--THE CHAMPIONS--CAN CHANGE THAT.
"I'M TALKING ABOUT EXTENDING A NEEDED HAND WHEN ORDINARY PEOPLE FACE OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY PROBLEMS. LIKE THOSE PATIENTS DR. LANSING TURNED INTO MONSTERS.*"
*LAST ISSUE--MARV.
WE'VE GOT POWER, MISTER--AND THAT EQUALS HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY IN MY BOOK. CAN YOU WALK AWAY FROM THAT?
YOU TELL 'IM, KID.
THOU DOST SPEAK WITH CONVICTION, ANGEL.
FOR THE NONCE, HERCULES WILL JOIN THEE.
THE BALANCE: ONE DECIDES, ANOTHER PONDERS.
I HOPE WARREN SELLS THE OTHERS ON THIS GROUP. THE MORE MAN-POWER HE'S GOT--
--THE EASIER IT'LL BE FOR ME WHEN I DECIDE TO SPLIT.
I'M NOT LIKE WARREN. IF I GO PUBLIC, I RISK LOSING MY SECRET IDENTITY.
WHAT EFFECT WOULD THAT HAVE ON THE REST OF THE DRAKE FAMILY?
WHAT'S WRONG, ROSE? YOU'RE SHIVERING!
I DON'T KNOW, ANNA. ALL OF A SUDDEN, THIS STRANGE CHILL CAME OVER ME.
BESIDES, I MAY WANT TO CHUCK THIS WHOLE ICEMAN BIT SOMEDAY--
--AND LIVE A NORMAL LIFE.
UH-OH!
I GUESS "SOMEDAY" IS STILL A WAYS OFF.
'CAUSE UNLESS THIS BANK GOES IN FOR WAY-OUT PROMOTIONS--
ATION BANK

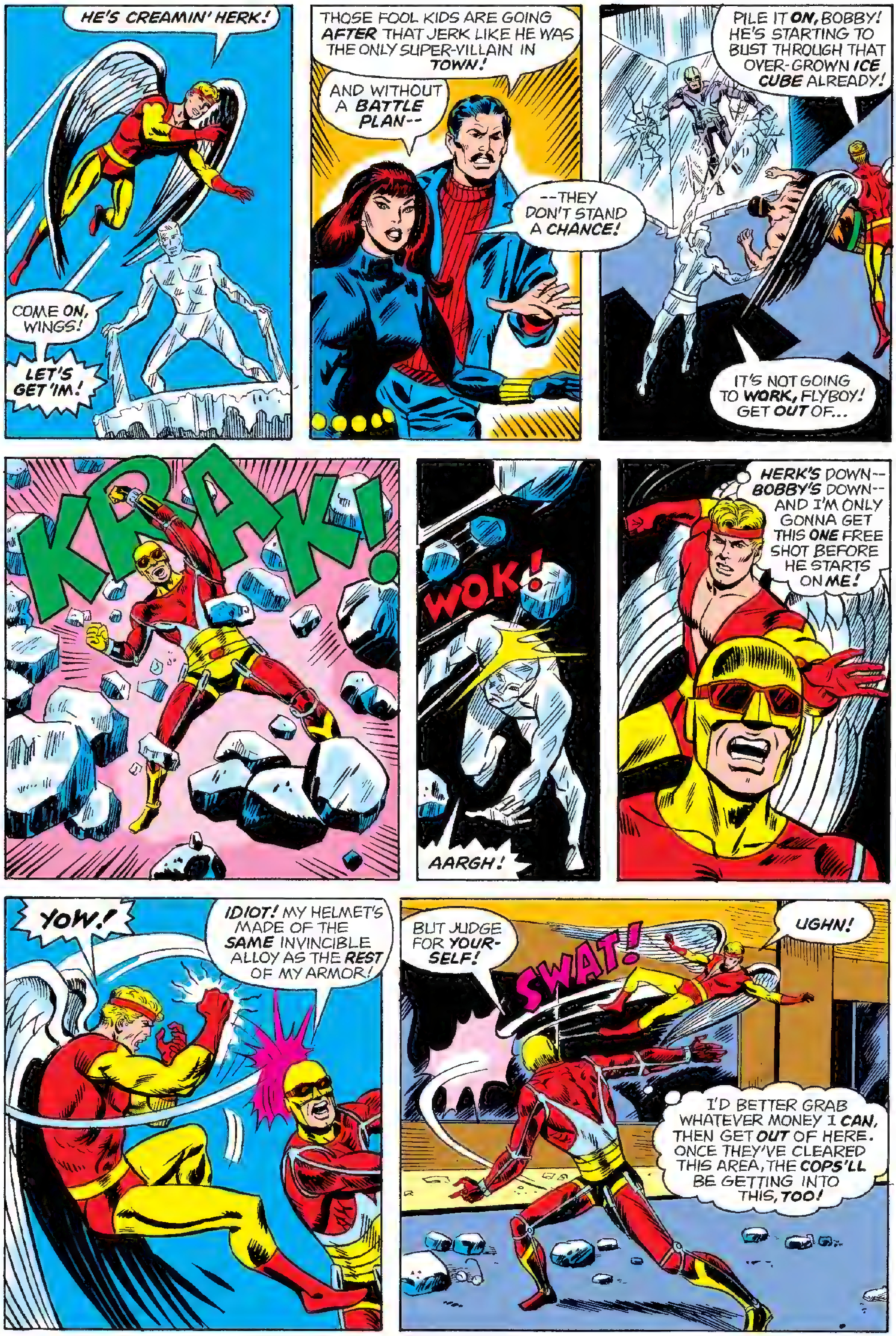

--IT'S BEING ROBBED!
NOT CLEVER, MISTER. TIME LOCK OR NOT, NO BANK IS GOING TO LEAVE ITSELF UNABLE TO OPEN ITS VAULT DURING BUSINESS HOURS.
PLEASE. I...
SKIP IT, FRIEND. IT'S PROBABLY JUST AS WELL I SHOW THIS CITY WHAT I CAN DO NOW.
CRUNCH
OTHERWISE, THE NEXT TIME I GET LIED TO, I MIGHT JUST LOSE MY TEMPER--
--AND HURT SOMEBODY!
RIPPPPP
WELL, IT DOES LOOK LIKE TIME FOR THE ICEMAN TO COMETH ONCE AGAIN, SO...
HMM... WONDER IF THE CHAMPS WILL PAY FOR ALL THE THREADS I'VE FREEZE-DRIED OUT OF EXISTENCE WITH THIS QUICK CHANGE NUMBER.
HAVE TO TALK TO WINGS ABOUT THAT. BUT IN THE PROVERBIAL MEANTIME...
GANGWAY, FOLKS!
ATIONAL BANK
THE ICEMAN EXPRESS WILL STOP HIM COLD!

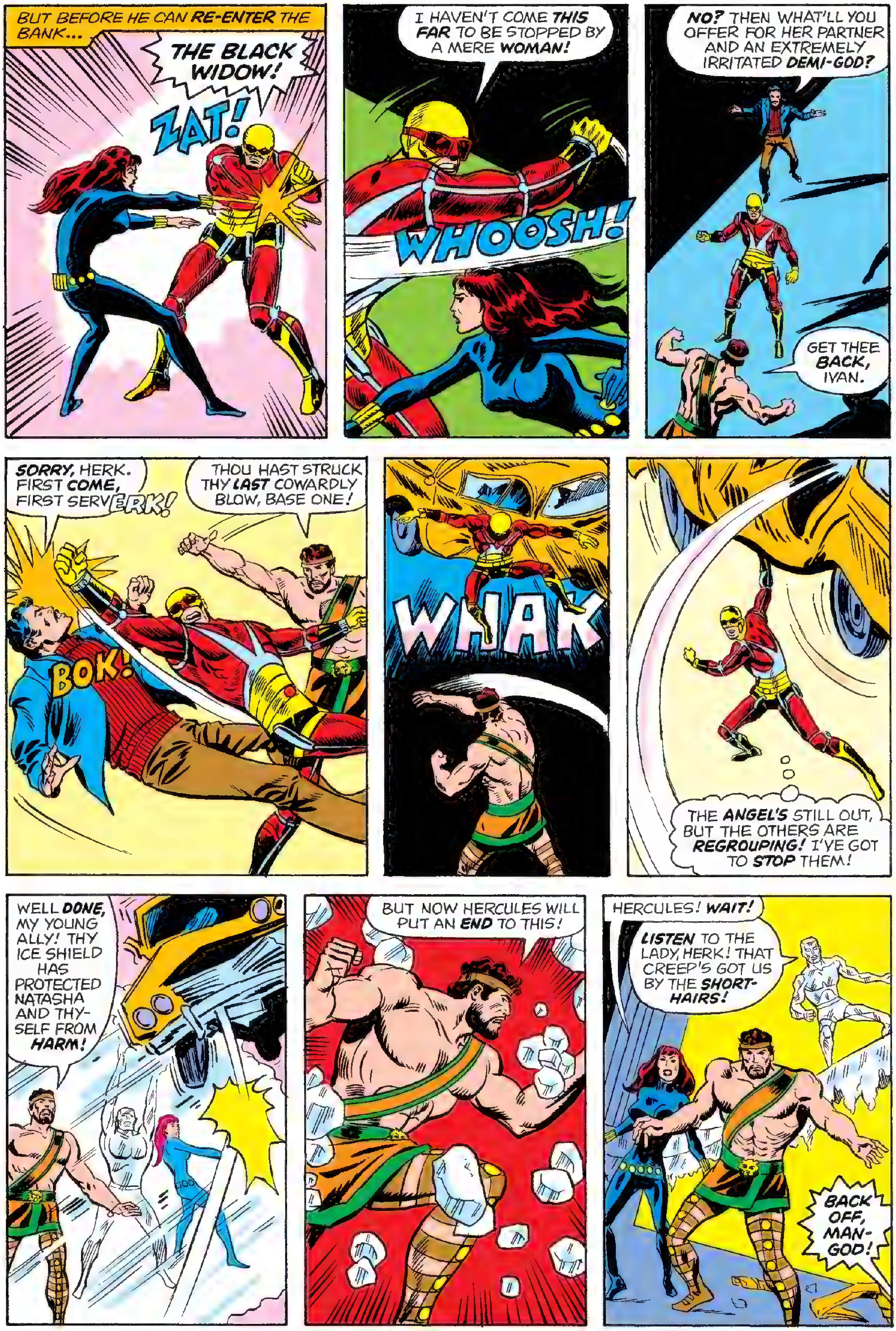

NOT LIKELY, PUNK!
WROP!
UGHN!
CRASH!
SHEESH! IF MY BATTERING RAM HADN'T ABSORBED THE BRUNT OF THAT PUNCH--
--LITTLE BOBBY DRAKE WOULD'VE BEEN BUSTED INTO AS MANY PIECES AS THAT WINDOW!
I DON'T EVEN GET A BREATHER!
THAT JOKER IS CHARGING AT ME LIKE A MAD BULL!
YOU THINK YOU CAN STOP ME WITH THIS INEFFECTUAL BARRAGE, ICEMAN?
THAT'S THE GENERAL IDEA, CHUCKLES.

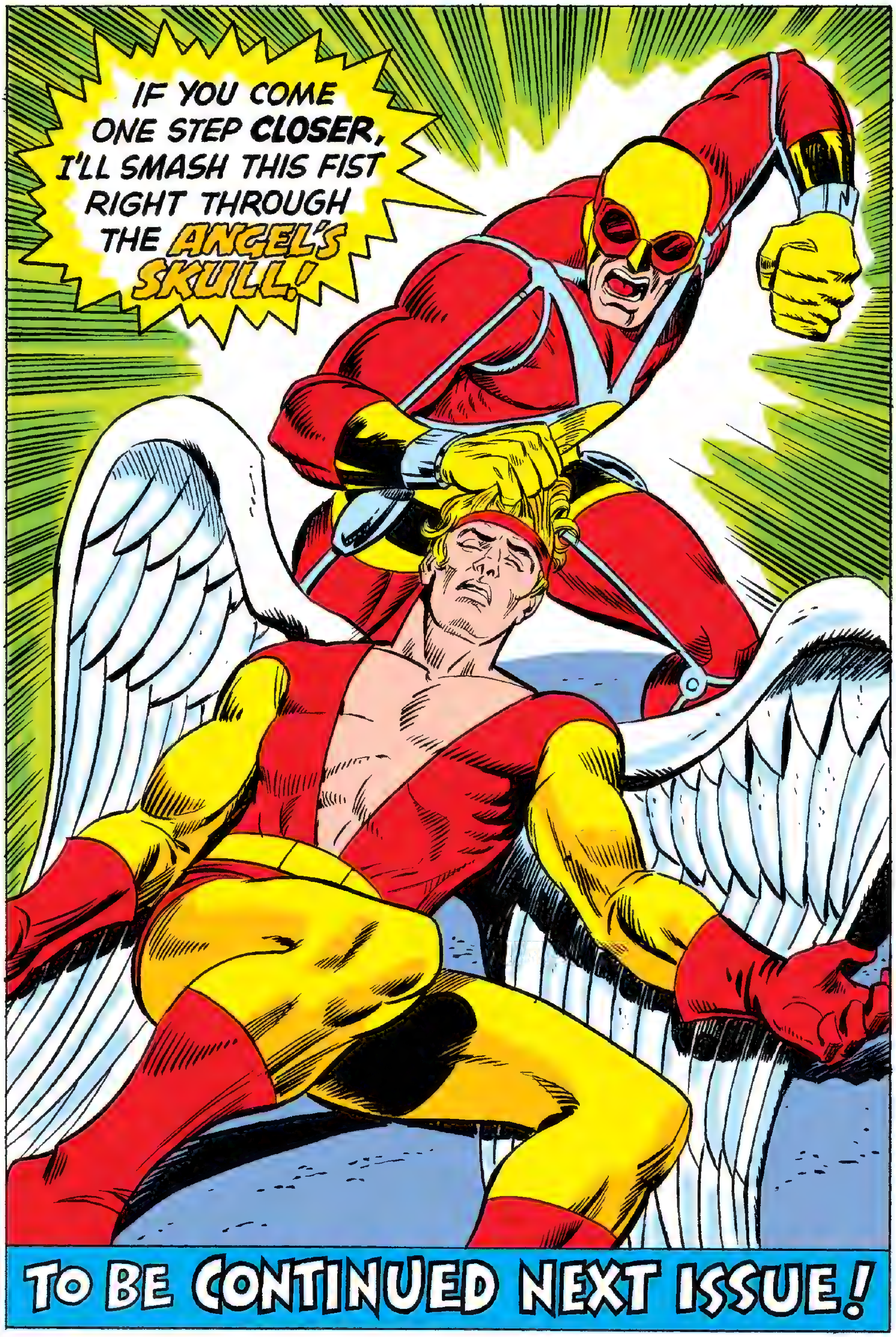

DON'T WASTE TIME TAKING IT TO THE *PATENT OFFICE,* LITTLE MAN.
BECAUSE AS *IDEAS* GO--
RENCH!
--IT ISN'T *WORTH MUCH!*
SWAT!
UHH!
MY HEAD FEELS LIKE A SOGGY *MARSHMALLOW.*
IF HE *CONNECTS* AGAIN...
DIDN'T YOUR MOM AND I *WARN* YOU TO STAY AWAY FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD *BULLY,* JUNIOR?
WARREN!
SLAM!
COMING TO YOU VIA THE COURTESY OF THE *ONE* EATERY IN L.A. THAT PLAYS *NEWS BROADCASTS* INSTEAD OF MUZAK!
THE ICEMAN'S EXTRA WEIGHT IS SLOWING YOU *DOWN,* ANGEL.
YOU'RE JUST GIVING ME *TWO* TARGETS FOR THE CUT-RATE PRICE OF *ONE!*


I THINK NOT, VILLAIN!
CLUNCH!
NOT WHILE HERCULES CALLS THEM COMRADES!
I'D HEARD THAT SEVERAL OF YOU "SUPERHEROES" HAD BANDED TOGETHER, BUT IT MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE TO ME.
ONE OR TEN--
SKRAKK
I CAN SMASH YOU ALL!
STARS! THOUGH THOU DOST HOWL LIKE A JACKAL--
--THY STRENGTH RIVALS THAT OF THE GOLDEN-CRESTED TITANS!
SKRRRR
STRENGTH ENOUGH TO CRUSH YOU, HERCULES!
I SAID THY MIGHT RIVALED THAT OF THE TITANS--
--NOT THAT OF THE PRINCE OF POWER!
YOU--YOU PULLED IT RIGHT OUT OF THESE MAGNETIC GRIPPERS!
BUT I'LL FINISH YOU OFF HAND-TO-HAND!
BY THE GODS, THE MAN IS CRAZED!


HARDLY, HERCULES.
COULD A MADMAN DEVELOP ARMOR POWERFUL ENOUGH TO FELL EVEN A SWAGGERING OLYMPIAN?
BRAKK!
MOMENTARILY, CRAZED ONE.
BUT ONLY MOMENTARILY!
THOOM!
OF ALL THE MYSTERIES THIS EARTH HOLDS, I SHALL NEVER UNDERSTAND--
--HOW A MORTAL CAN GAIN SUCH POWER AND THEN DO SO LITTLE WITH IT.
I SUPPOSE ARES IS A BOY SCOUT!
I WOULDN'T MAKE LIGHT OF HERCULES, ANGEL.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, 'TASHA. HE'S TOO BUSY CONGRATULATIN' HIMSELF TO TAKE OFFENSE.
ARES IS THE GOD OF WAR, MY FRIEND.
IT BE HIS NATURE TO ACT AS HE DOES.
HERCULES!
TOO LATE, LADY!
CLUBB!
YOU DIDN'T FIGURE ON THIS RIG'S--
--PROTECTIVE POWER!
SMASH!


HE'S CREAMIN' HERK!
COME ON, WINGS!
LET'S GET 'IM!
THOSE FOOL KIDS ARE GOING AFTER THAT JERK LIKE HE WAS THE ONLY SUPER-VILLAIN IN TOWN!
AND WITHOUT A BATTLE PLAN--
--THEY DON'T STAND A CHANCE!
PILE IT ON, BOBBY! HE'S STARTING TO BUST THROUGH THAT OVER-GROWN ICE CUBE ALREADY!
IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK, FLYBOY! GET OUT OF...
KRAK!
WOK!
AARGH!
HERK'S DOWN-- BOBBY'S DOWN-- AND I'M ONLY GONNA GET THIS ONE FREE SHOT BEFORE HE STARTS ON ME!
YOW!
IDIOT! MY HELMET'S MADE OF THE SAME INVINCIBLE ALLOY AS THE REST OF MY ARMOR!
BUT JUDGE FOR YOURSELF!
SWAT!
UGHN!
I'D BETTER GRAB WHATEVER MONEY I CAN, THEN GET OUT OF HERE. ONCE THEY'VE CLEARED THIS AREA, THE COPS'LL BE GETTING INTO THIS, TOO!


BUT BEFORE HE CAN RE-ENTER THE BANK...
THE BLACK WIDOW!
ZAT!
I HAVEN'T COME THIS FAR TO BE STOPPED BY A MERE WOMAN!
WHOOSH!
NO? THEN WHAT'LL YOU OFFER FOR HER PARTNER AND AN EXTREMELY IRRITATED DEMI-GOD?
GET THEE BACK, IVAN.
SORRY, HERK. FIRST COME, FIRST SERVERK!
THOU HAST STRUCK THY LAST COWARDLY BLOW, BASE ONE!
BOK!
WHAK
THE ANGEL'S STILL OUT, BUT THE OTHERS ARE REGROUPING! I'VE GOT TO STOP THEM!
WELL DONE, MY YOUNG ALLY! THY ICE SHIELD HAS PROTECTED NATASHA AND THYSELF FROM HARM!
BUT NOW HERCULES WILL PUT AN END TO THIS!
HERCULES! WAIT!
LISTEN TO THE LADY, HERK! THAT CREEP'S GOT US BY THE SHORT-HAIRS!
BACK OFF, MAN-GOD!


IF YOU COME ONE STEP CLOSER, I'LL SMASH THIS FIST RIGHT THROUGH THE ANGEL'S SKULL!
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE!

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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THE HOUSE OF IDEAS DOES IT AGAIN! ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT MARVEL MAG!
MAYBE YOU CLOWNS JUST FORMED THE CHAMPIONS...
...BUT NOW RAMPAGE IS GONNA RIP YOUR TEAM APART!

The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

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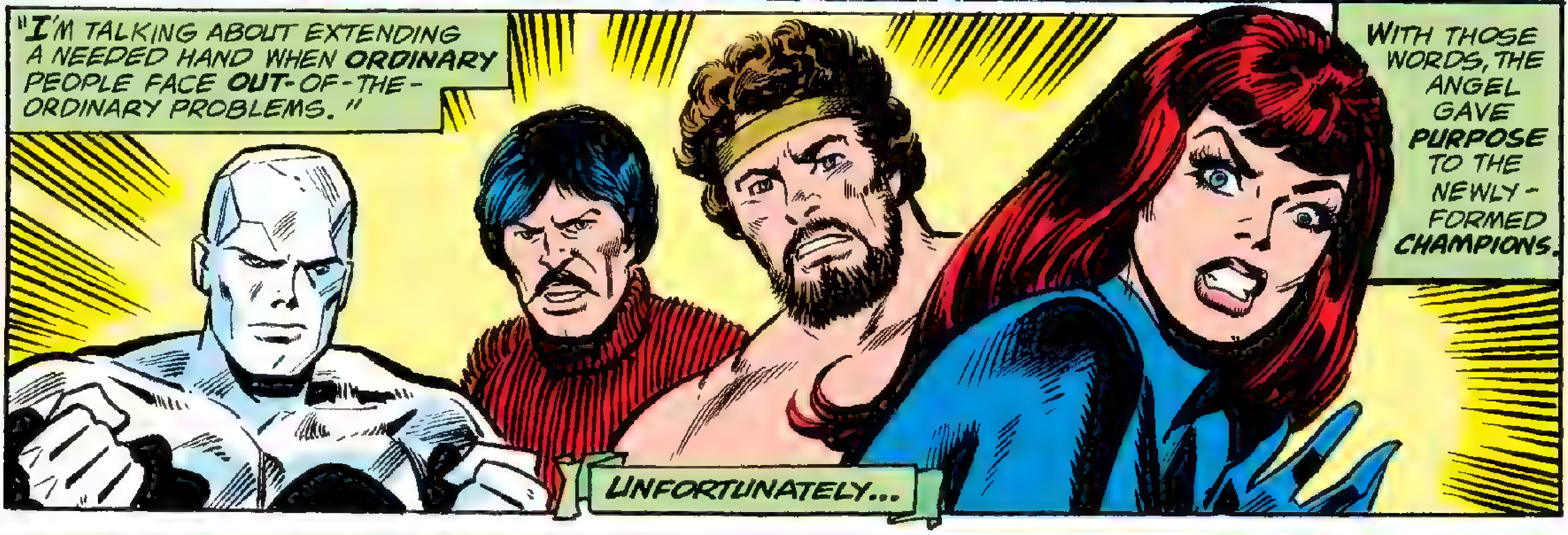
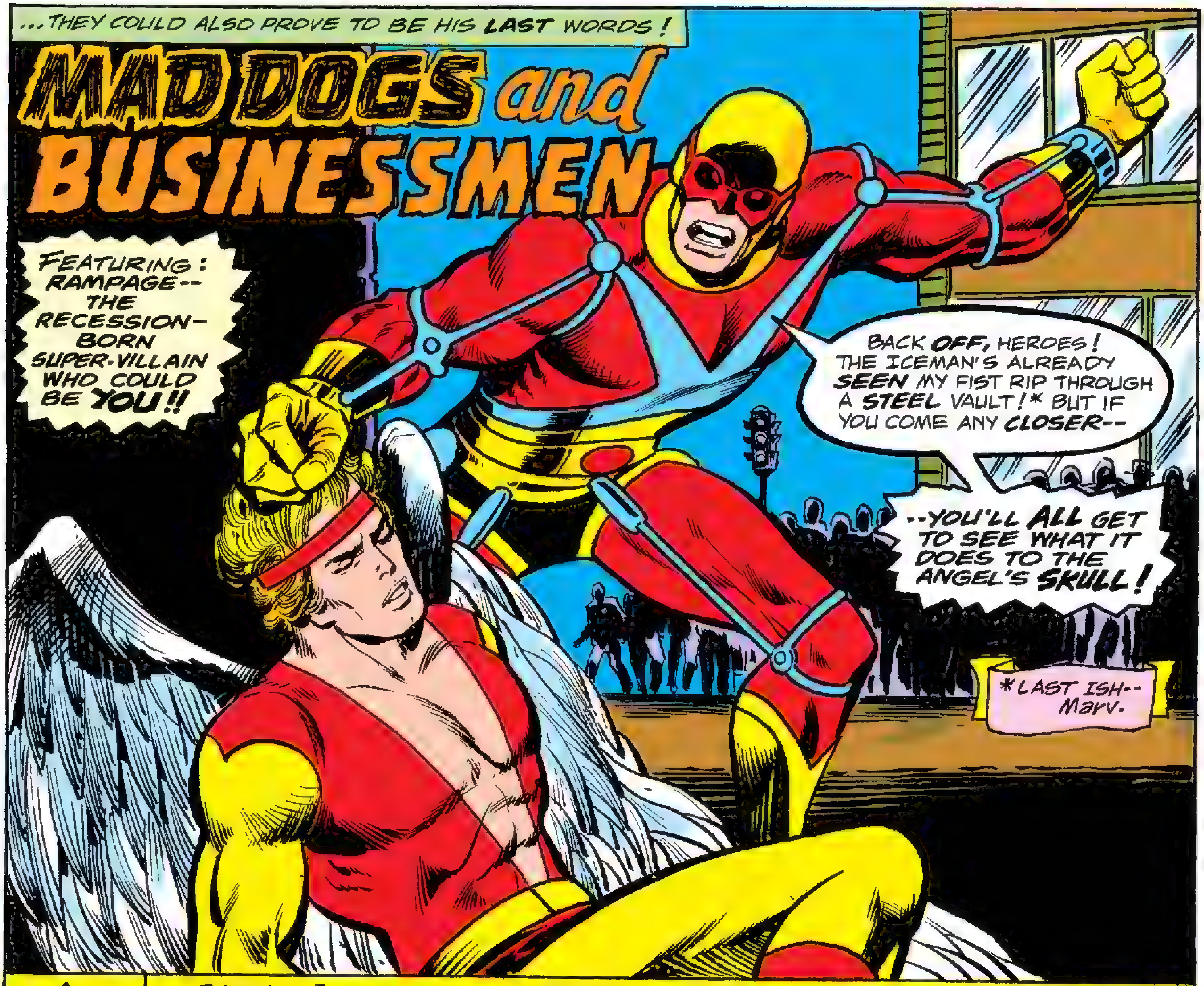
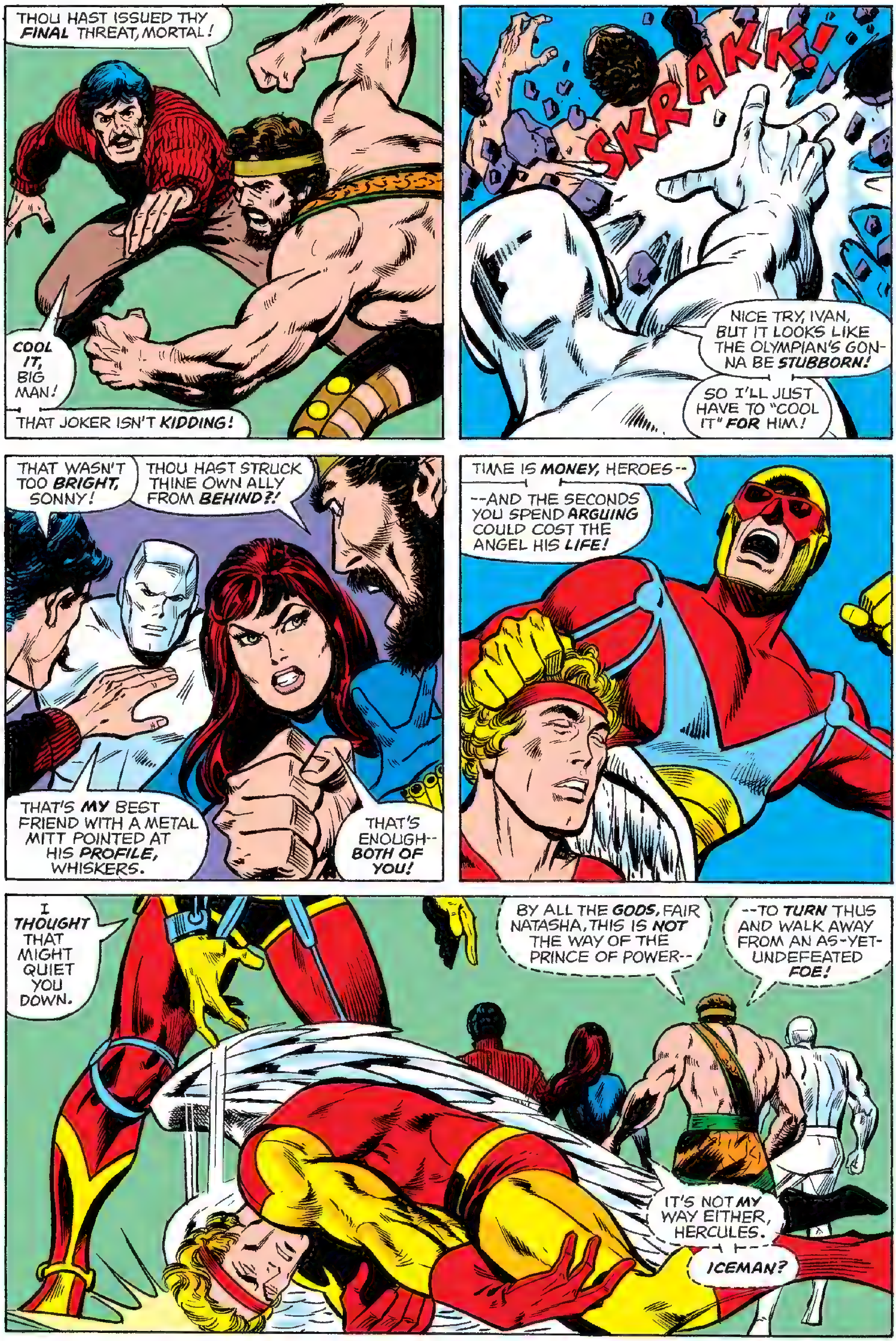

"I'M TALKING ABOUT EXTENDING A NEEDED HAND WHEN ORDINARY PEOPLE FACE OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY PROBLEMS."
WITH THOSE WORDS, THE ANGEL GAVE PURPOSE TO THE NEWLY-FORMED CHAMPIONS.
UNFORTUNATELY...

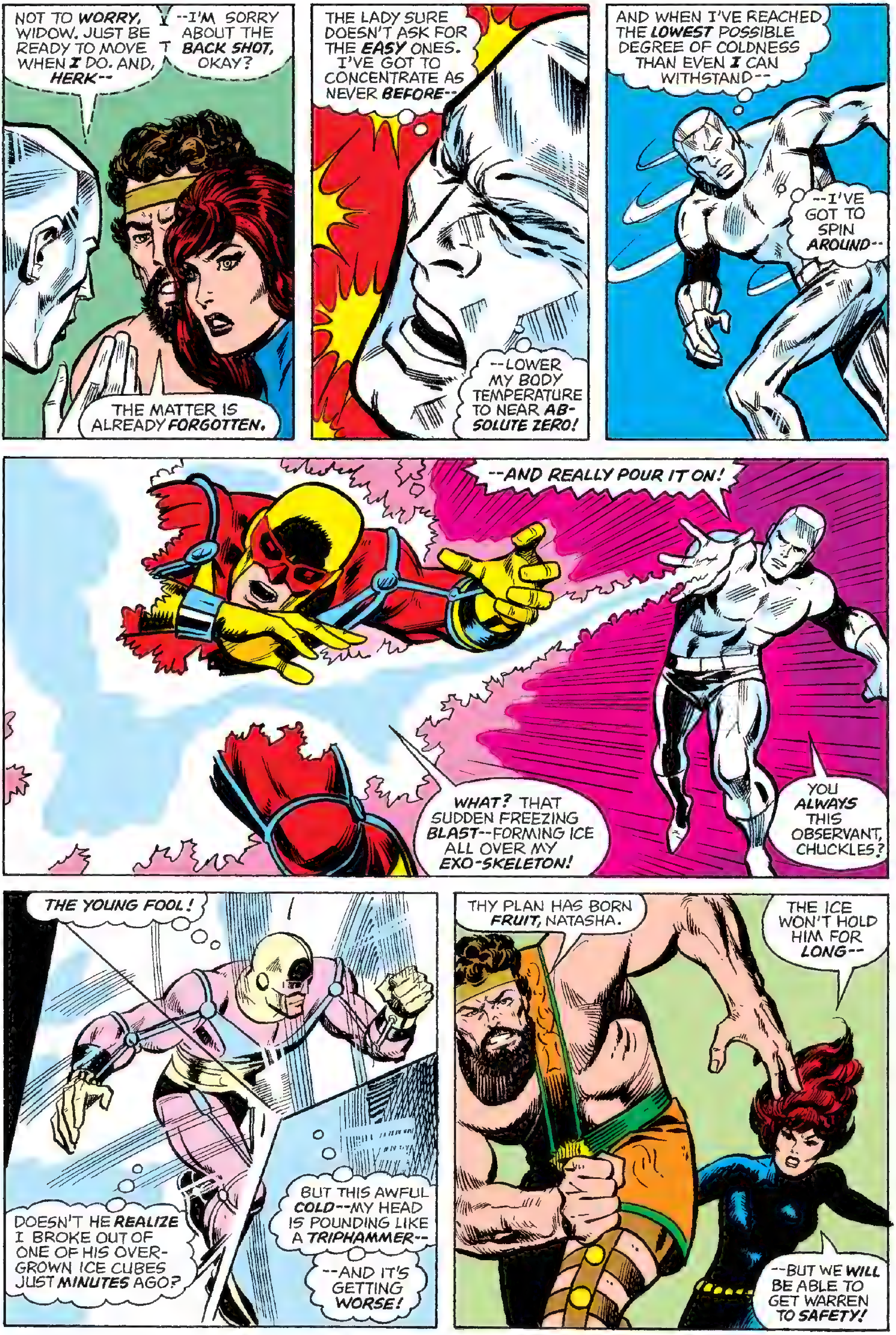
...THEY COULD ALSO PROVE TO BE HIS LAST WORDS!

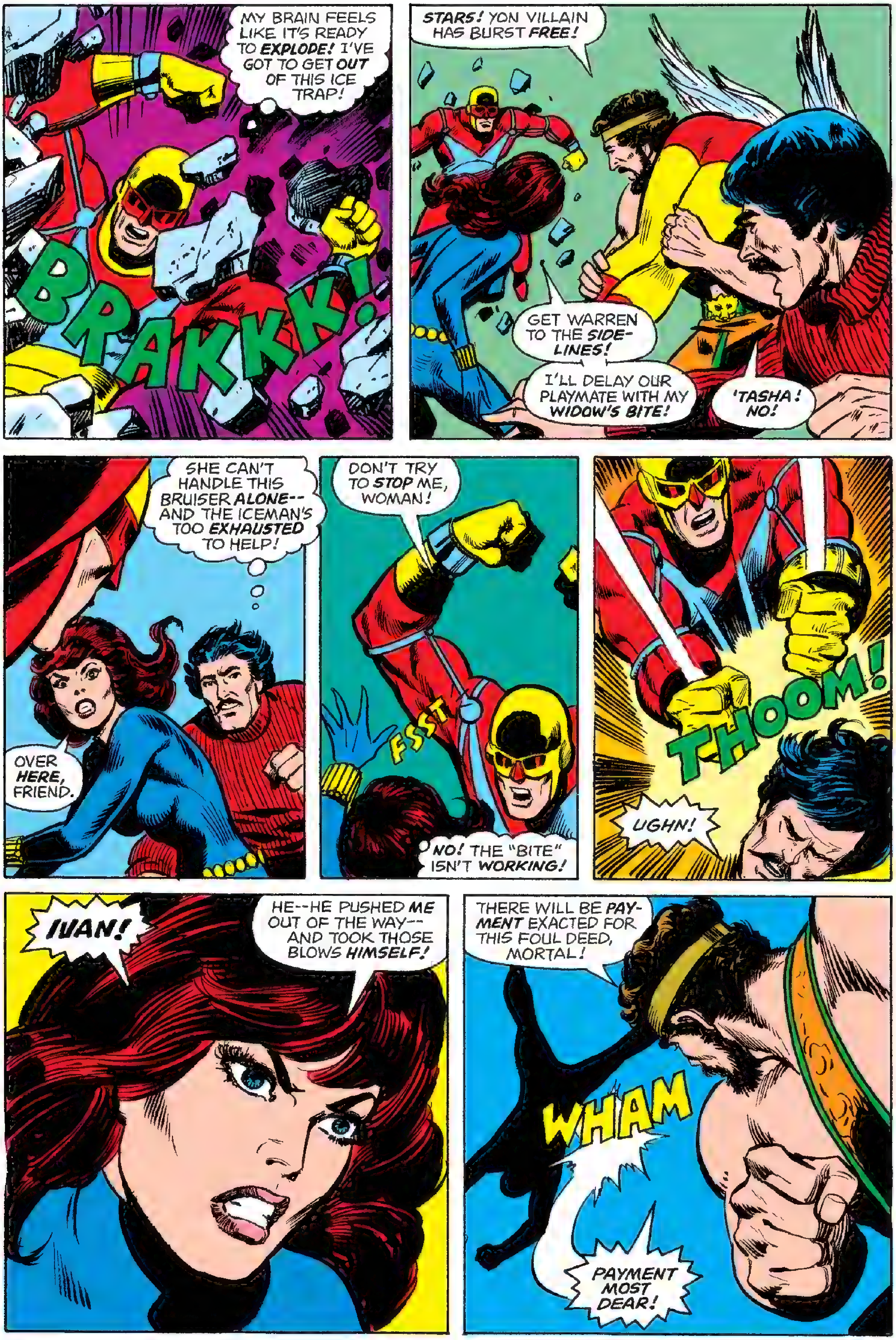
MAD DOGS and BUSINESSMEN

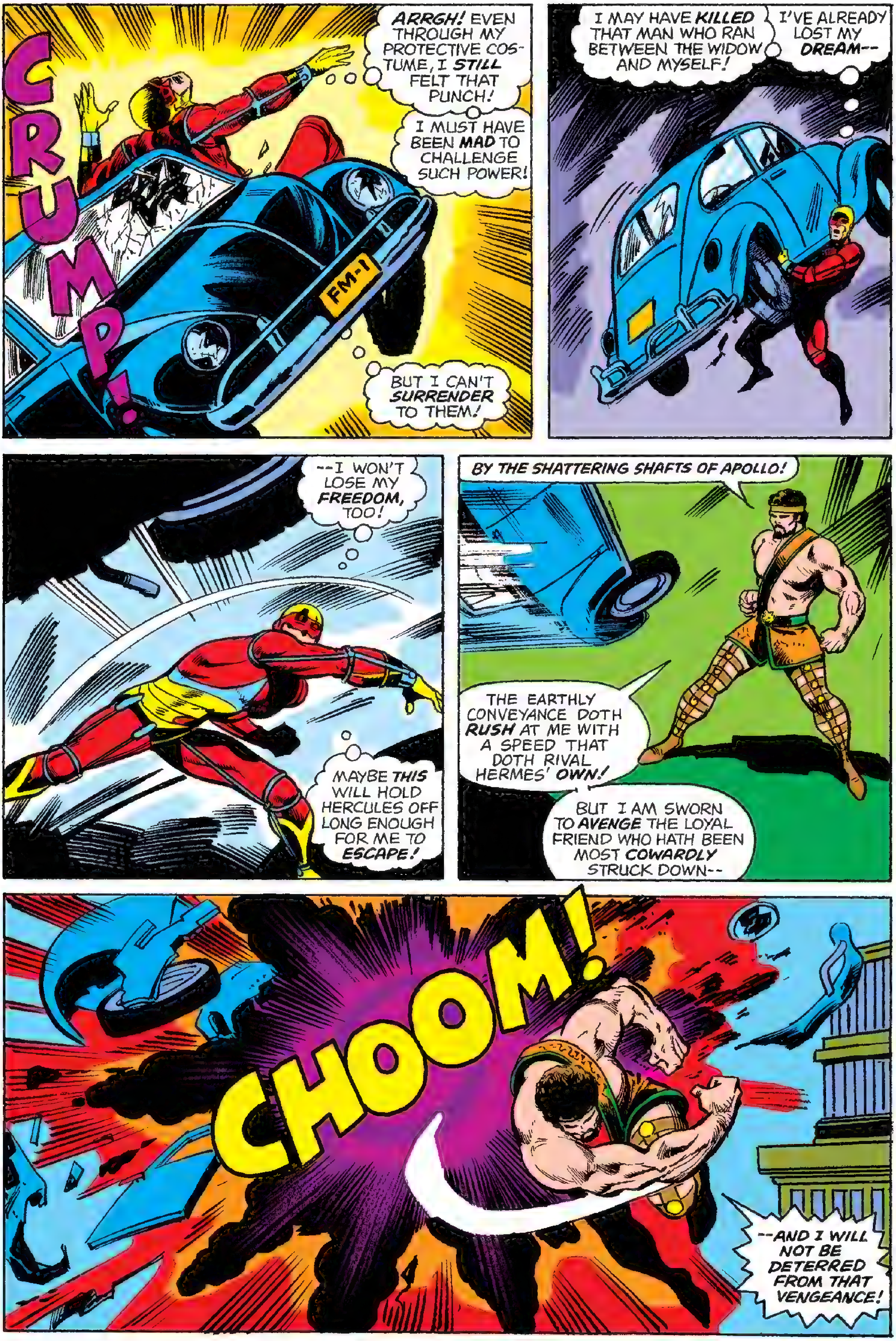

FEATURING: RAMPAGE--THE RECESSION-BORN SUPER-VILLAIN WHO COULD BE YOU!!
BACK OFF, HEROES! THE ICEMAN'S ALREADY SEEN MY FIST RIP THROUGH A STEEL VAULT!* BUT IF YOU COME ANY CLOSER--
--YOU'LL ALL GET TO SEE WHAT IT DOES TO THE ANGEL'S SKULL!
*LAST ISH--Marv.

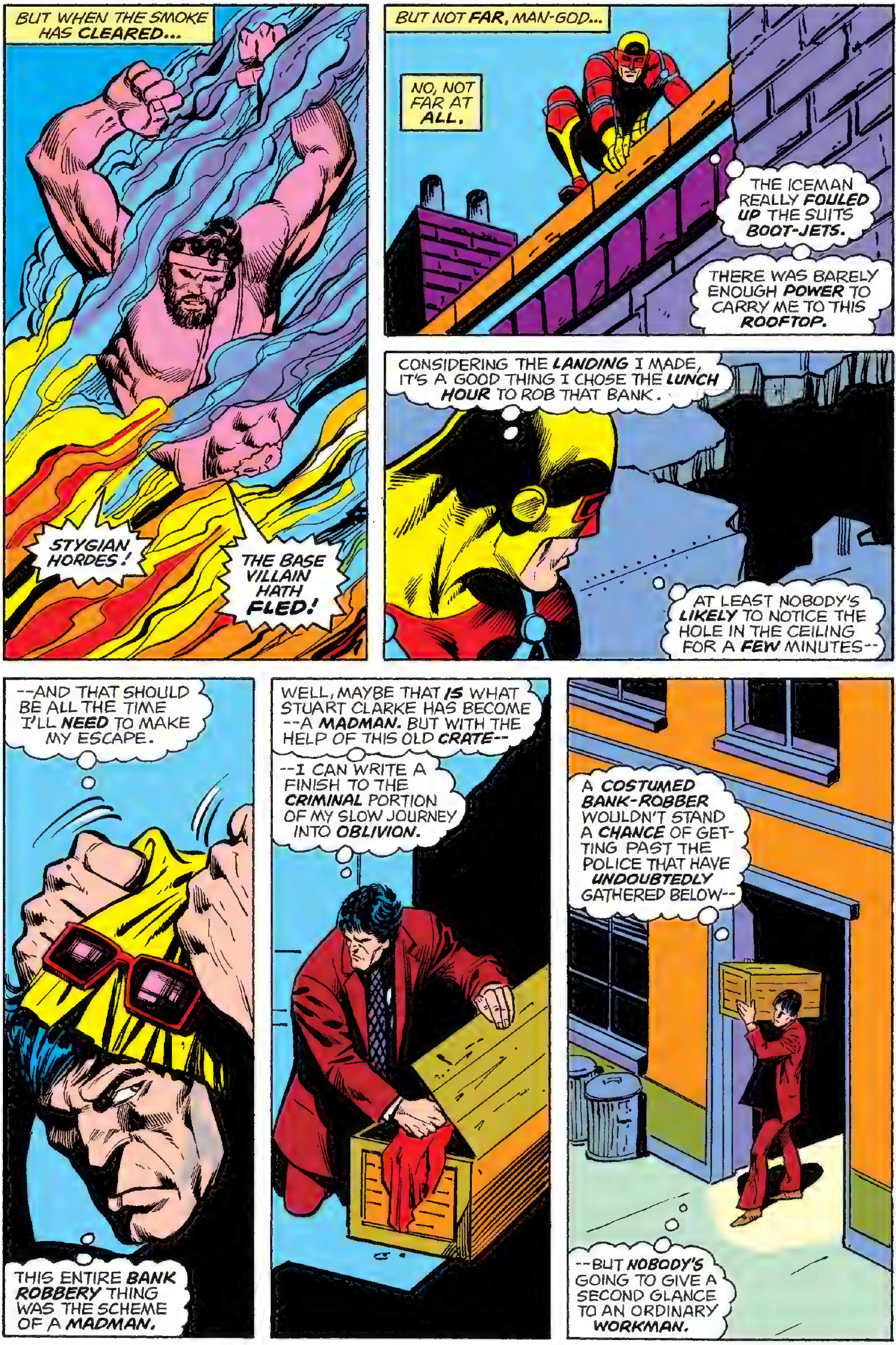
A TRAGEDY OF TODAY BY: TONY ISABELLA, AUTHOR | GEORGE TUSKA & VINCE COLLETTA ARTISTS | IRV WATANABE LETTERER | PETRA GOLDBERG COLORIST | MARV WOLFMAN EDITOR

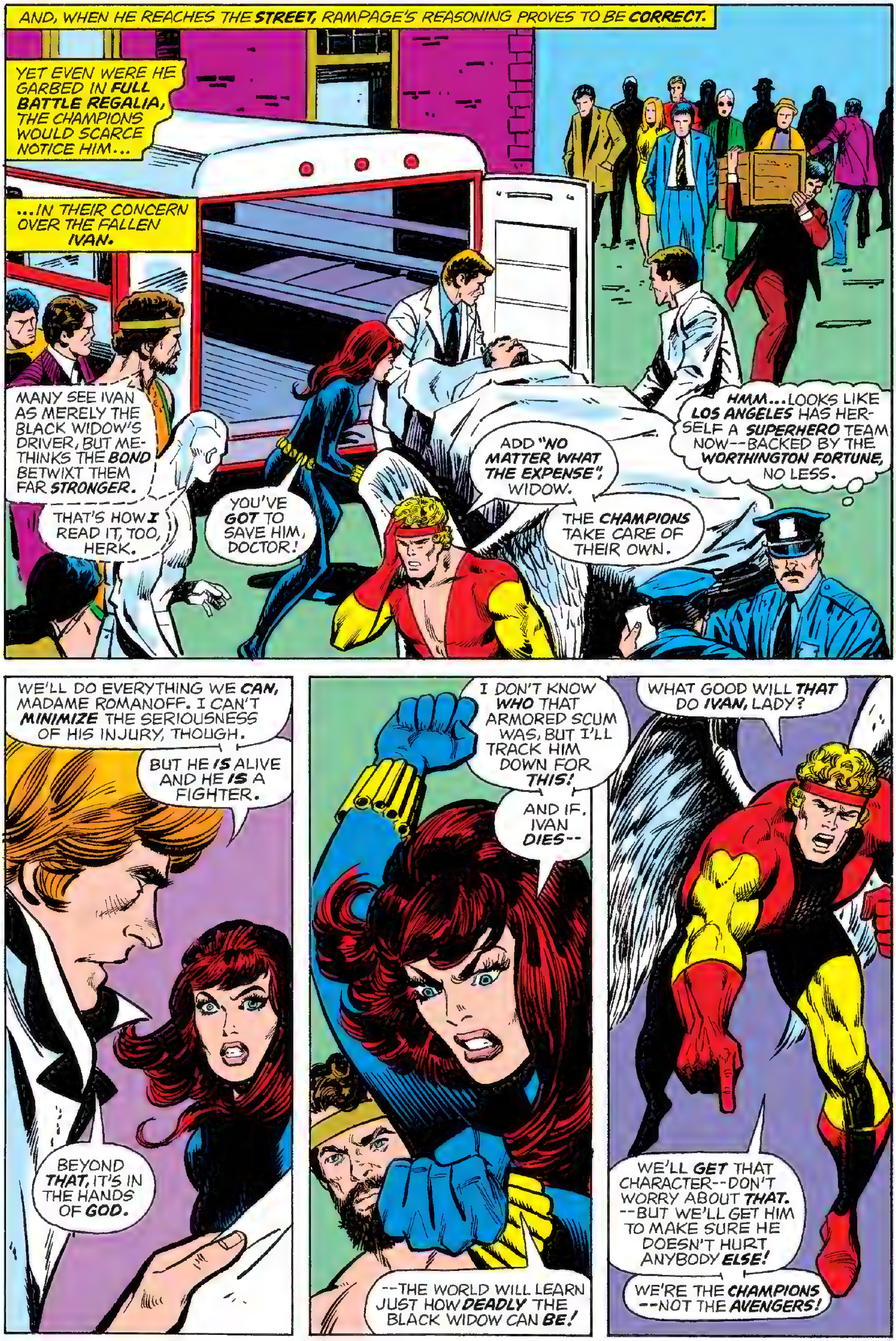

THOU HAST ISSUED THY FINAL THREAT, MORTAL!
COOL IT, BIG MAN!
THAT JOKER ISN'T KIDDING!
SKRAKK!
NICE TRY, IVAN, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THE OLYMPIAN'S GONNA BE STUBBORN!
SO I'LL JUST HAVE TO "COOL IT" FOR HIM!
THAT WASN'T TOO BRIGHT, SONNY!
THOU HAST STRUCK THINE OWN ALLY FROM BEHIND?!
THAT'S MY BEST FRIEND WITH A METAL MITT POINTED AT HIS PROFILE, WHISKERS.
THAT'S ENOUGH-- BOTH OF YOU!
TIME IS MONEY, HEROES--
--AND THE SECONDS YOU SPEND ARGUING COULD COST THE ANGEL HIS LIFE!
I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT QUIET YOU DOWN.
BY ALL THE GODS, FAIR NATASHA, THIS IS NOT THE WAY OF THE PRINCE OF POWER--
--TO TURN THUS AND WALK AWAY FROM AN AS-YET-UNDEFEATED FOE!
IT'S NOT MY WAY EITHER, HERCULES.
ICEMAN?

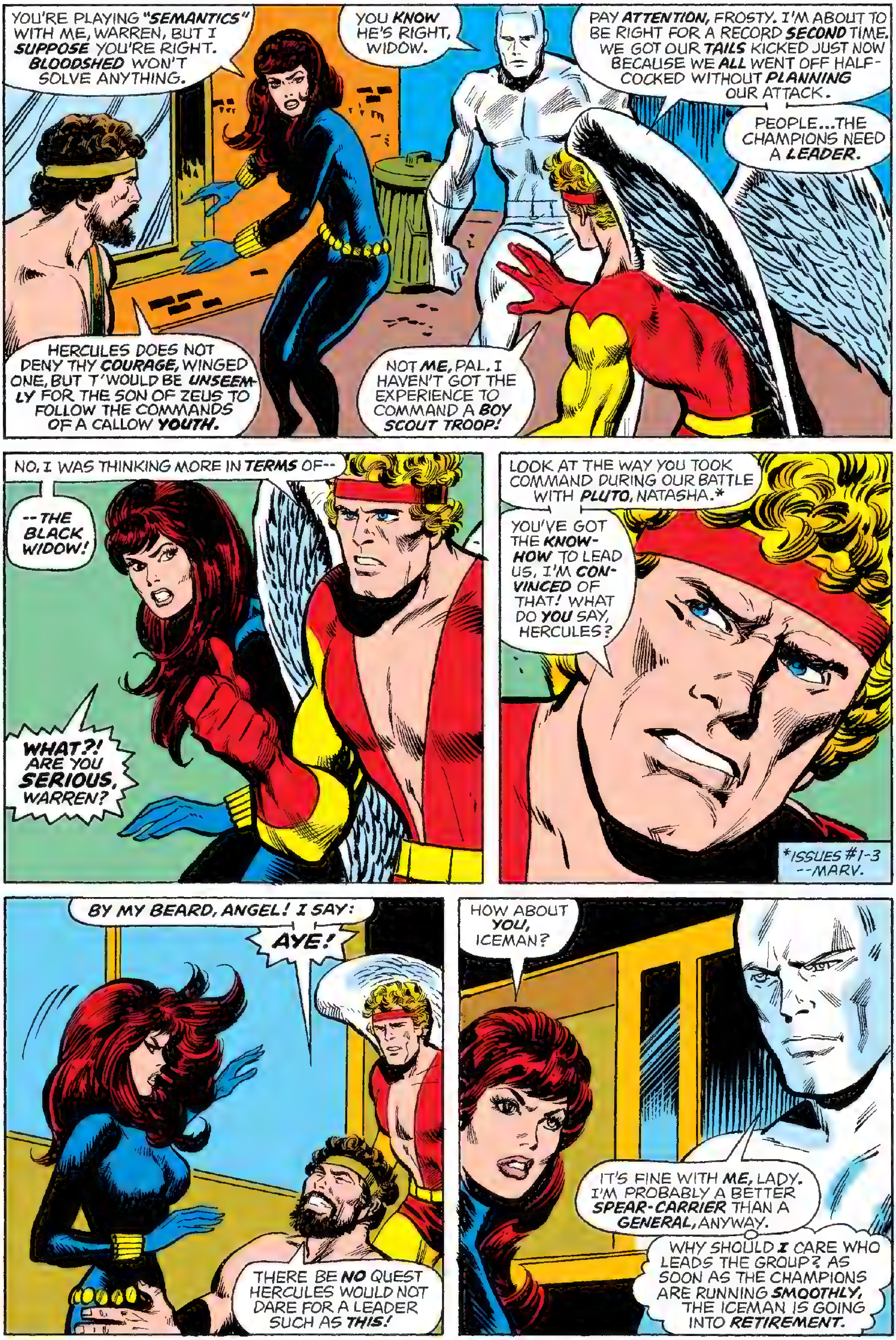

NOT TO WORRY, WIDOW. JUST BE READY TO MOVE WHEN I DO. AND, HERK--
--I'M SORRY ABOUT THE BACK SHOT, OKAY?
THE MATTER IS ALREADY FORGOTTEN.
THE LADY SURE DOESN'T ASK FOR THE EASY ONES. I'VE GOT TO CONCENTRATE AS NEVER BEFORE--
--LOWER MY BODY TEMPERATURE TO NEAR ABSOLUTE ZERO!
AND WHEN I'VE REACHED THE LOWEST POSSIBLE DEGREE OF COLDNESS THAN EVEN I CAN WITHSTAND--
--I'VE GOT TO SPIN AROUND--
--AND REALLY POUR IT ON!
WHAT? THAT SUDDEN FREEZING BLAST--FORMING ICE ALL OVER MY EXO-SKELETON!
YOU ALWAYS THIS OBSERVANT, CHUCKLES?
THE YOUNG FOOL!
DOESN'T HE REALIZE I BROKE OUT OF ONE OF HIS OVERGROWN ICE CUBES JUST MINUTES AGO?
BUT THIS AWFUL COLD--MY HEAD IS POUNDING LIKE A TRIPHAMMER--
--AND IT'S GETTING WORSE!
THY PLAN HAS BORN FRUIT, NATASHA.
THE ICE WON'T HOLD HIM FOR LONG--
--BUT WE WILL BE ABLE TO GET WARREN TO SAFETY!

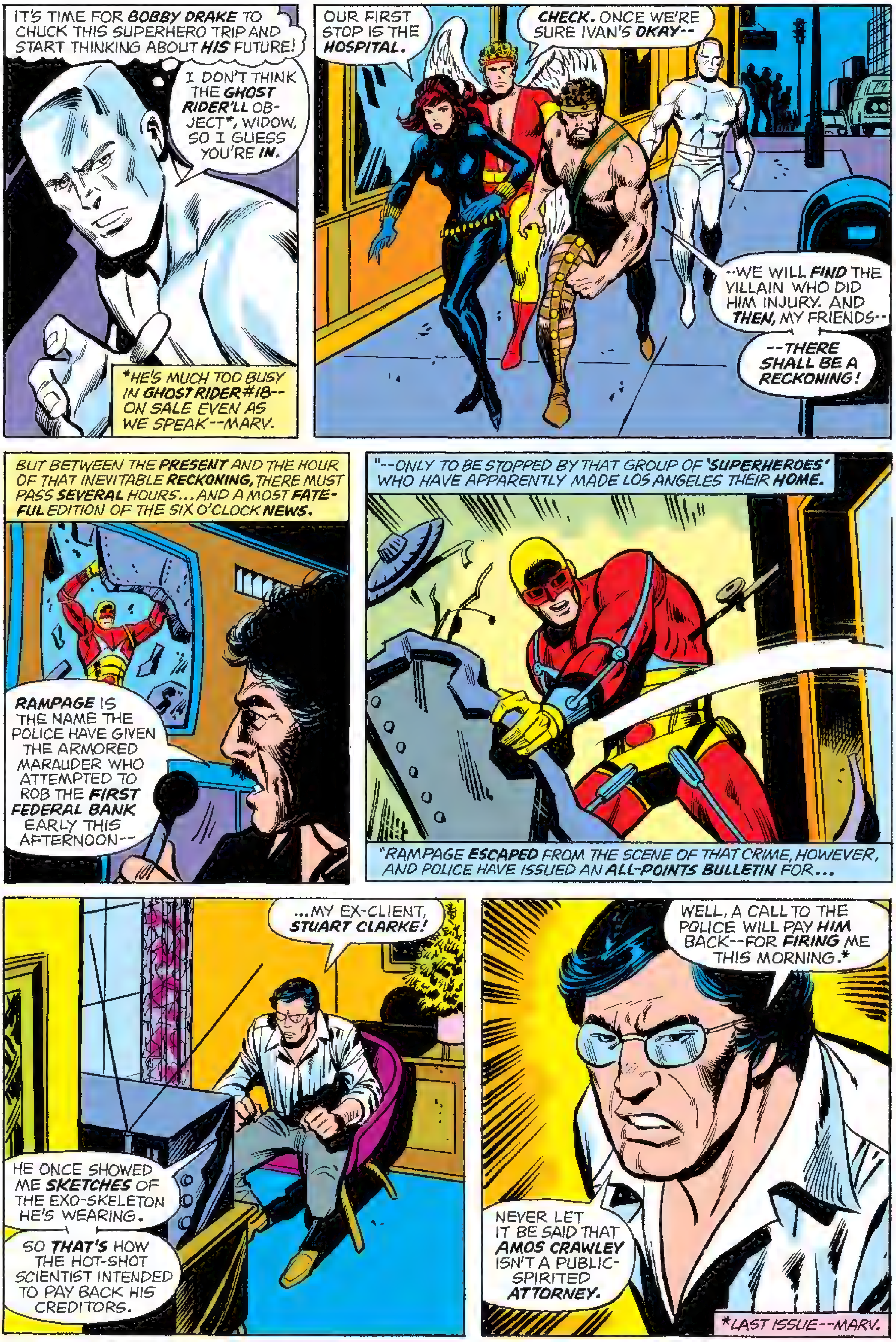

MY BRAIN FEELS LIKE IT'S READY TO **EXPLODE!** I'VE GOT TO GET **OUT** OF THIS ICE TRAP!
BRAKKK!
STARS! YON VILLAIN HAS BURST **FREE!**
GET WARREN TO THE **SIDE-LINES!**
I'LL DELAY OUR PLAYMATE WITH MY **WIDOW'S BITE!**
'TASHA! NO!
SHE CAN'T HANDLE THIS BRUISER **ALONE**-- AND THE ICEMAN'S TOO **EXHAUSTED** TO HELP!
OVER **HERE,** FRIEND.
DON'T TRY TO **STOP** ME, WOMAN!
FSST
NO! THE "BITE" ISN'T **WORKING!**
THOOM!
UGHN!
IVAN!
HE--HE PUSHED **ME** OUT OF THE WAY-- AND TOOK THOSE BLOWS **HIMSELF!**
THERE WILL BE **PAYMENT** EXACTED FOR THIS FOUL DEED, MORTAL!
WHAM
PAYMENT MOST DEAR!

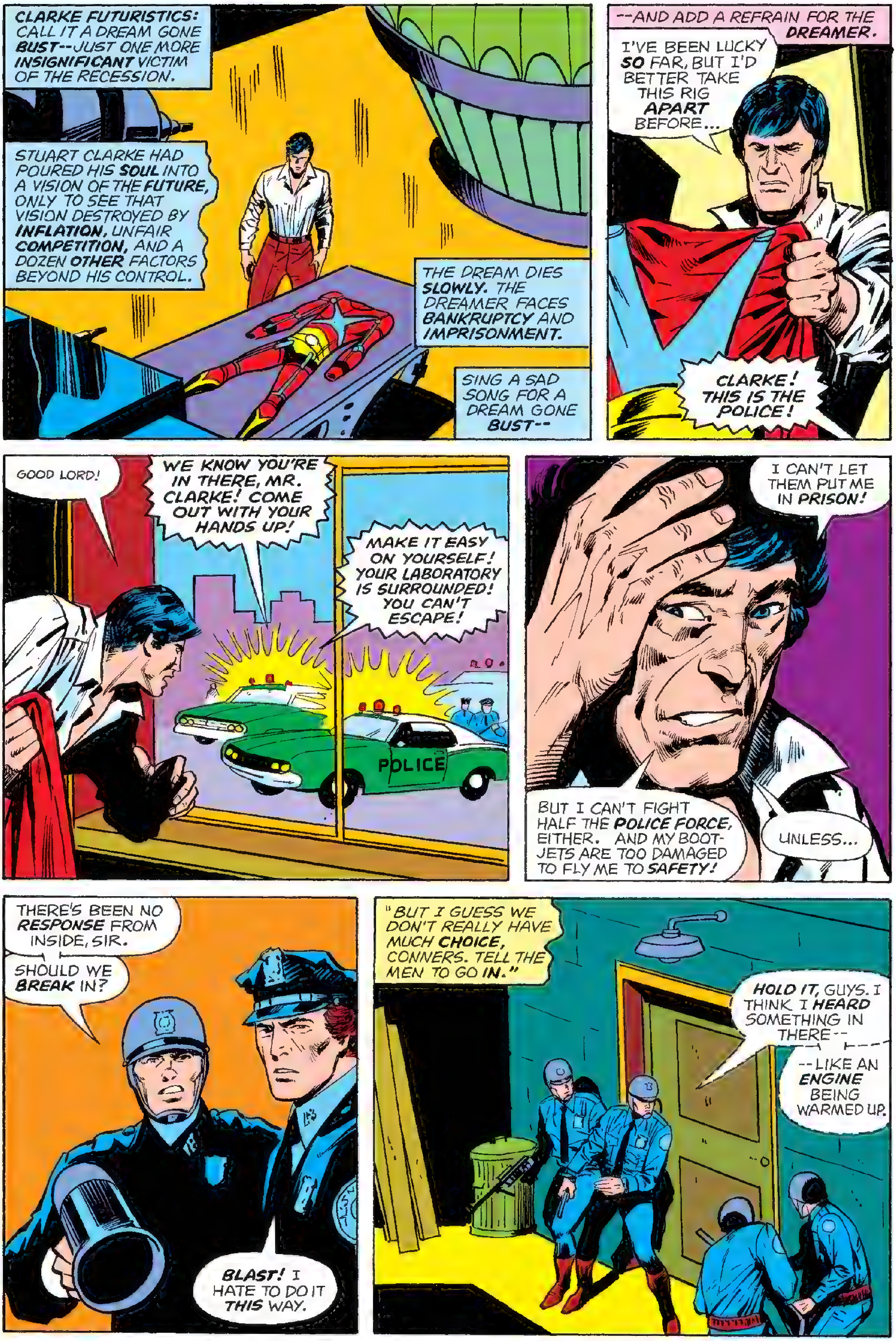

CRUMP!
ARRGH! EVEN THROUGH MY PROTECTIVE COSTUME, I STILL FELT THAT PUNCH!
I MUST HAVE BEEN MAD TO CHALLENGE SUCH POWER!
FM-1
BUT I CAN'T SURRENDER TO THEM!
I MAY HAVE KILLED THAT MAN WHO RAN BETWEEN THE WIDOW AND MYSELF!
I'VE ALREADY LOST MY DREAM--
--I WON'T LOSE MY FREEDOM, TOO!
MAYBE THIS WILL HOLD HERCULES OFF LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO ESCAPE!
BY THE SHATTERING SHAFTS OF APOLLO!
THE EARTHLY CONVEYANCE DOTH RUSH AT ME WITH A SPEED THAT DOTH RIVAL HERMES' OWN!
BUT I AM SWORN TO AVENGE THE LOYAL FRIEND WHO HATH BEEN MOST COWARDLY STRUCK DOWN--
CHOOM!
--AND I WILL NOT BE DETERRED FROM THAT VENGEANCE!

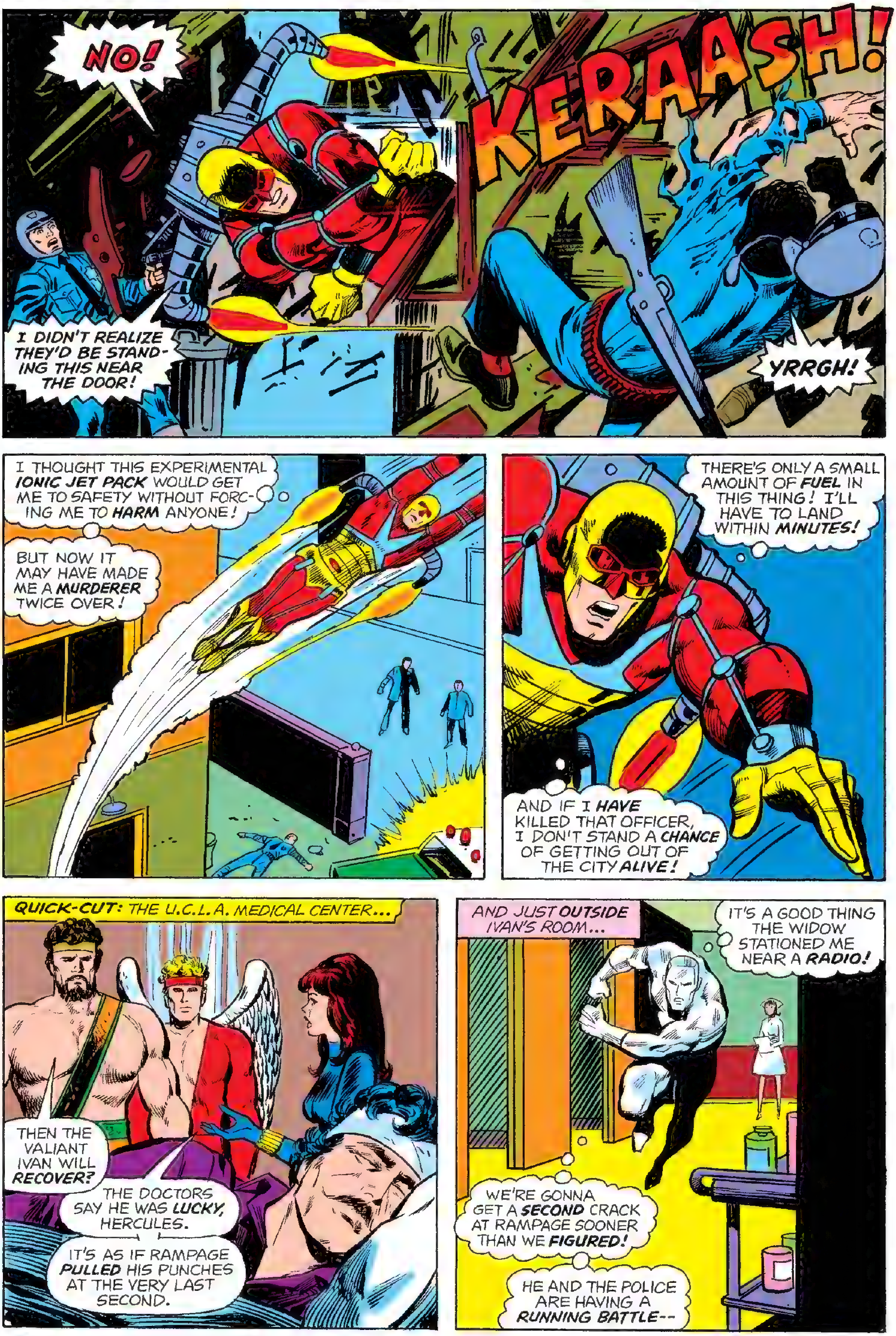

BUT WHEN THE SMOKE HAS CLEARED...
STYGIAN HORDES!
THE BASE VILLAIN HATH FLED!
BUT NOT FAR, MAN-GOD...
NO, NOT FAR AT ALL.
THE ICEMAN REALLY FOULED UP THE SUITS BOOT-JETS.
THERE WAS BARELY ENOUGH POWER TO CARRY ME TO THIS ROOFTOP.
CONSIDERING THE LANDING I MADE, IT'S A GOOD THING I CHOSE THE LUNCH HOUR TO ROB THAT BANK.
AT LEAST NOBODY'S LIKELY TO NOTICE THE HOLE IN THE CEILING FOR A FEW MINUTES--
--AND THAT SHOULD BE ALL THE TIME I'LL NEED TO MAKE MY ESCAPE.
THIS ENTIRE BANK ROBBERY THING WAS THE SCHEME OF A MADMAN.
WELL, MAYBE THAT IS WHAT STUART CLARKE HAS BECOME --A MADMAN. BUT WITH THE HELP OF THIS OLD CRATE--
--I CAN WRITE A FINISH TO THE CRIMINAL PORTION OF MY SLOW JOURNEY INTO OBLIVION.
A COSTUMED BANK-ROBBER WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE OF GETTING PAST THE POLICE THAT HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY GATHERED BELOW--
--BUT NOBODY'S GOING TO GIVE A SECOND GLANCE TO AN ORDINARY WORKMAN.

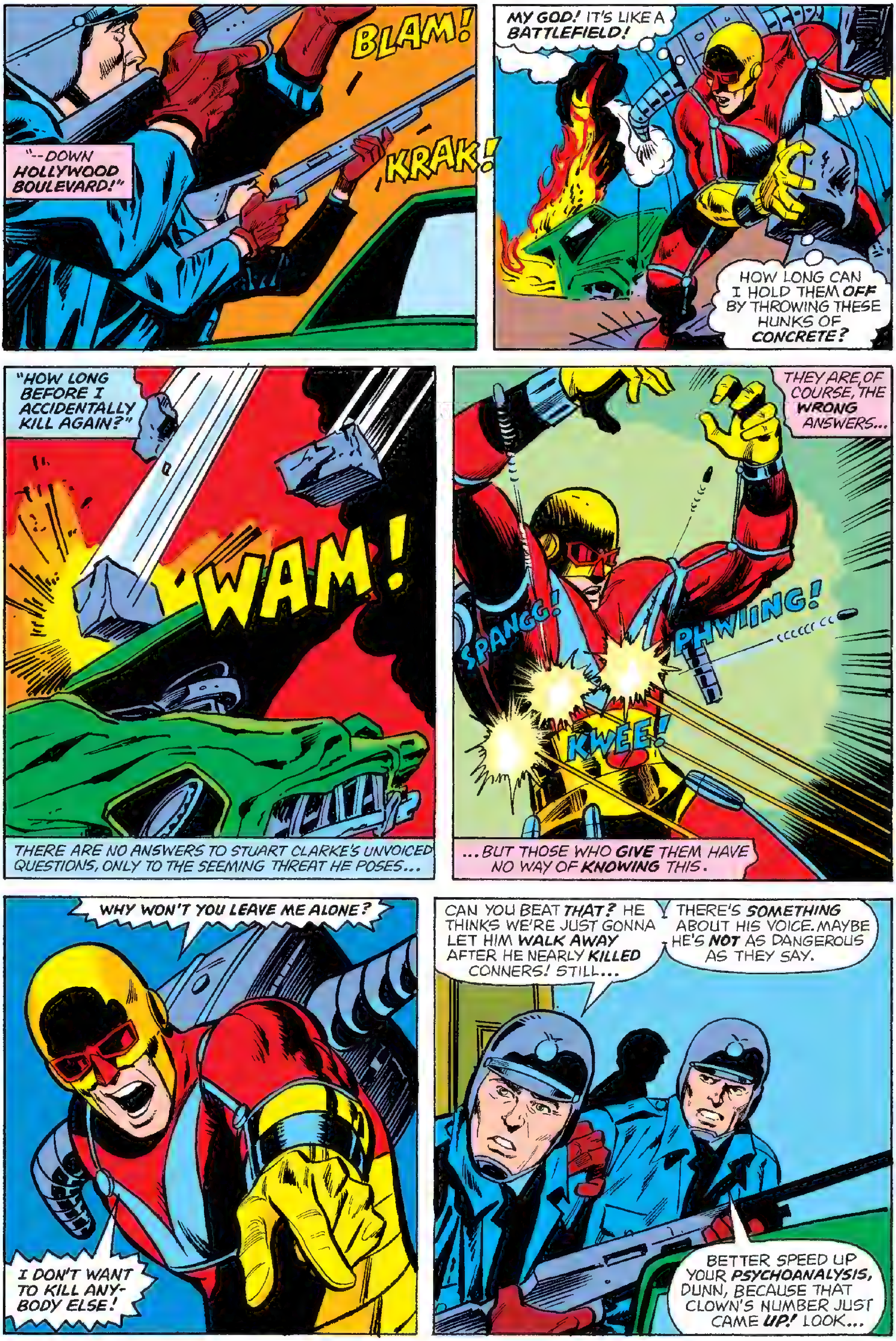

AND, WHEN HE REACHES THE **STREET**, RAMPAGE'S REASONING PROVES TO BE **CORRECT**.
YET EVEN WERE HE GARBED IN **FULL BATTLE REGALIA**, THE CHAMPIONS WOULD SCARCE NOTICE HIM...
...IN THEIR CONCERN OVER THE FALLEN **IVAN**.
MANY SEE IVAN AS MERELY THE BLACK WIDOW'S DRIVER, BUT ME-THINKS THE **BOND** BETWIXT THEM FAR **STRONGER**.
THAT'S HOW **I** READ IT, TOO, HERK.
YOU'VE **GOT** TO SAVE HIM, DOCTOR!
ADD **"NO MATTER WHAT THE EXPENSE"**, WIDOW.
THE **CHAMPIONS** TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN.
HMM... LOOKS LIKE **LOS ANGELES** HAS HERSELF A **SUPERHERO** TEAM NOW--BACKED BY THE **WORTHINGTON FORTUNE**, NO LESS.
WE'LL DO EVERYTHING WE **CAN**, MADAME ROMANOFF. I CAN'T **MINIMIZE** THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS INJURY, THOUGH.
BUT HE **IS** ALIVE AND HE **IS** A FIGHTER.
BEYOND **THAT**, IT'S IN THE HANDS OF **GOD**.
I DON'T KNOW **WHO** THAT ARMORED SCUM WAS, BUT I'LL TRACK HIM DOWN FOR **THIS!**
AND IF IVAN **DIES**--
--THE WORLD WILL LEARN JUST HOW **DEADLY** THE BLACK WIDOW CAN **BE!**
WHAT GOOD WILL **THAT** DO **IVAN**, LADY?
WE'LL **GET** THAT CHARACTER--DON'T WORRY ABOUT **THAT**. --BUT WE'LL GET HIM TO MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T HURT ANYBODY **ELSE!**
WE'RE THE **CHAMPIONS** --NOT THE **AVENGERS!**

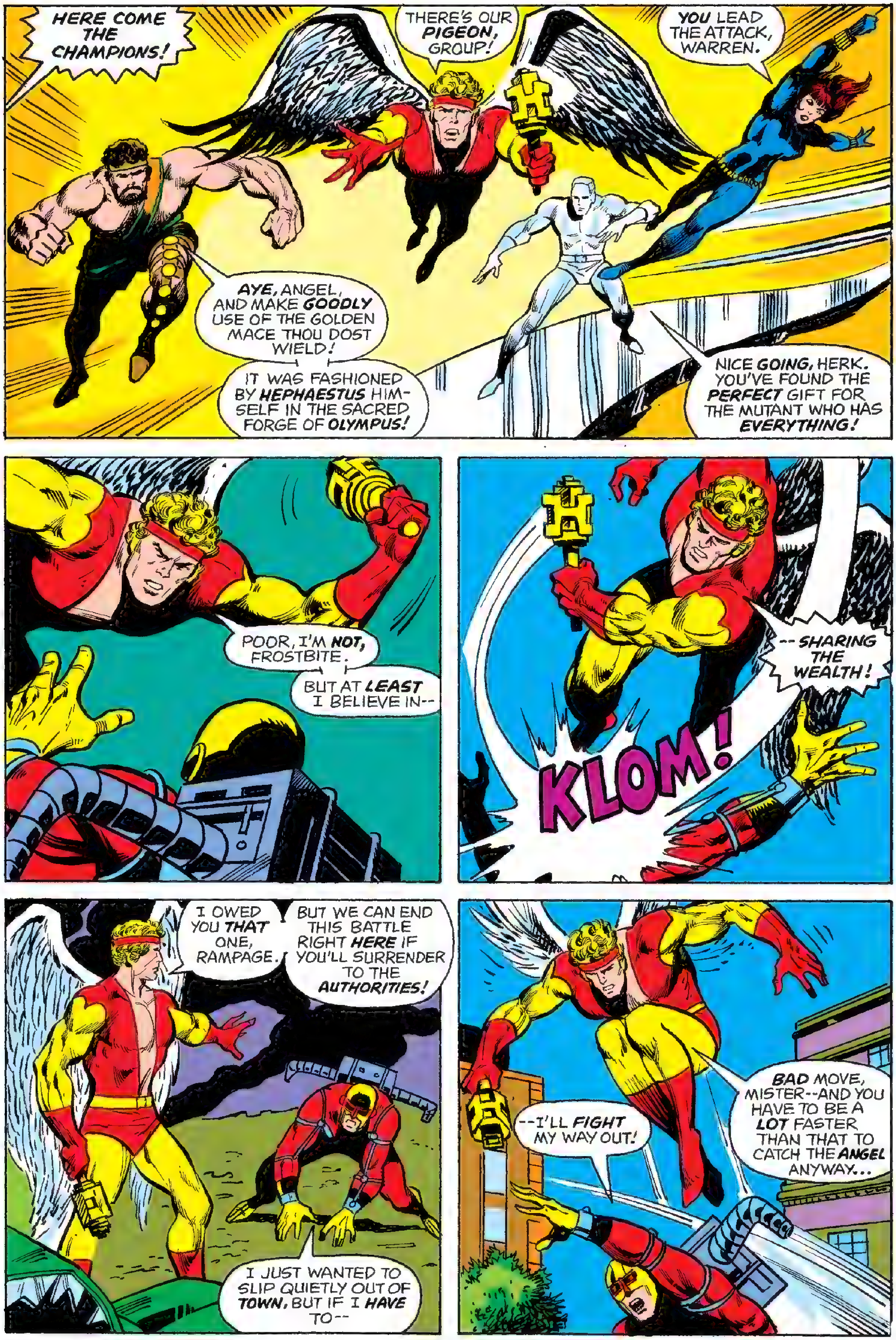

YOU'RE PLAYING "SEMANTICS" WITH ME, WARREN, BUT I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT. BLOODSHED WON'T SOLVE ANYTHING.
YOU KNOW HE'S RIGHT, WIDOW.
PAY ATTENTION, FROSTY. I'M ABOUT TO BE RIGHT FOR A RECORD SECOND TIME. WE GOT OUR TAILS KICKED JUST NOW BECAUSE WE ALL WENT OFF HALF-COCKED WITHOUT PLANNING OUR ATTACK.
PEOPLE...THE CHAMPIONS NEED A LEADER.
HERCULES DOES NOT DENY THY COURAGE, WINGED ONE, BUT T'WOULD BE UNSEEMLY FOR THE SON OF ZEUS TO FOLLOW THE COMMANDS OF A CALLOW YOUTH.
NOT ME, PAL. I HAVEN'T GOT THE EXPERIENCE TO COMMAND A BOY SCOUT TROOP!
NO, I WAS THINKING MORE IN TERMS OF--
--THE BLACK WIDOW!
WHAT?! ARE YOU SERIOUS, WARREN?
LOOK AT THE WAY YOU TOOK COMMAND DURING OUR BATTLE WITH PLUTO, NATASHA.*
YOU'VE GOT THE KNOW-HOW TO LEAD US, I'M CONVINCED OF THAT! WHAT DO YOU SAY, HERCULES?
*ISSUES #1-3 --MARV.
BY MY BEARD, ANGEL! I SAY:
AYE!
THERE BE NO QUEST HERCULES WOULD NOT DARE FOR A LEADER SUCH AS THIS!
HOW ABOUT YOU, ICEMAN?
IT'S FINE WITH ME, LADY. I'M PROBABLY A BETTER SPEAR-CARRIER THAN A GENERAL, ANYWAY.
WHY SHOULD I CARE WHO LEADS THE GROUP? AS SOON AS THE CHAMPIONS ARE RUNNING SMOOTHLY, THE ICEMAN IS GOING INTO RETIREMENT.

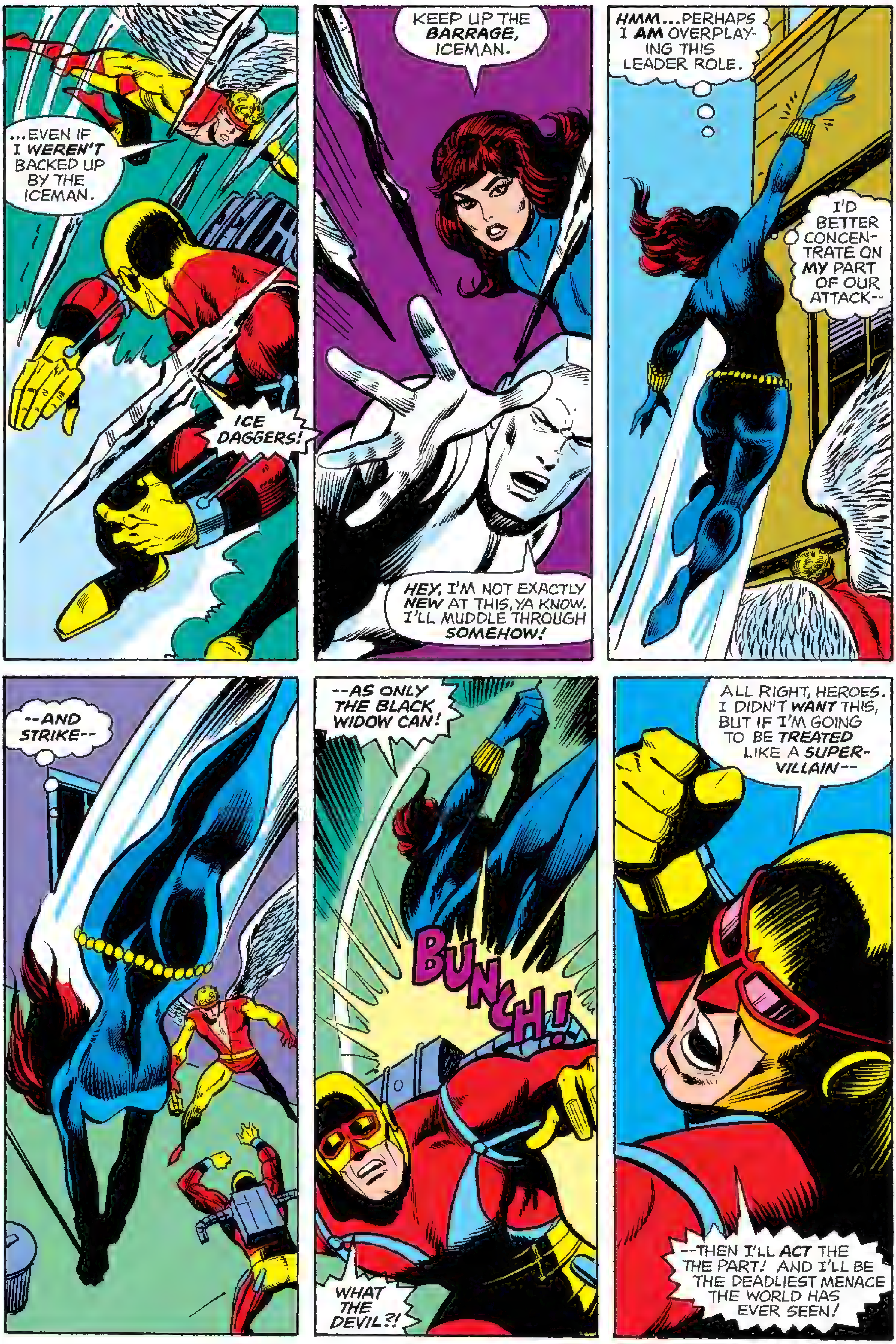

IT'S TIME FOR **BOBBY DRAKE** TO CHUCK THIS SUPERHERO TRIP AND START THINKING ABOUT **HIS** FUTURE!
I DON'T THINK THE **GHOST RIDER'LL** OBJECT*, WIDOW, SO I GUESS YOU'RE **IN.**
*HE'S MUCH TOO BUSY IN **GHOST RIDER #18**--ON SALE EVEN AS WE SPEAK--MARV.
OUR FIRST STOP IS THE **HOSPITAL.**
CHECK. ONCE WE'RE SURE IVAN'S **OKAY**--
--WE WILL **FIND** THE VILLAIN WHO DID HIM INJURY. AND **THEN,** MY FRIENDS--
--**THERE SHALL BE A RECKONING!**
BUT BETWEEN THE **PRESENT** AND THE HOUR OF THAT INEVITABLE **RECKONING,** THERE MUST PASS **SEVERAL** HOURS... AND A MOST **FATEFUL** EDITION OF THE SIX O'CLOCK **NEWS.**
RAMPAGE IS THE NAME THE POLICE HAVE GIVEN THE ARMORED MARAUDER WHO ATTEMPTED TO ROB THE **FIRST FEDERAL BANK** EARLY THIS AFTERNOON--
"--ONLY TO BE STOPPED BY THAT GROUP OF **'SUPERHEROES'** WHO HAVE APPARENTLY MADE LOS ANGELES THEIR **HOME.**
"RAMPAGE **ESCAPED** FROM THE SCENE OF THAT CRIME, HOWEVER, AND POLICE HAVE ISSUED AN **ALL-POINTS BULLETIN** FOR...
...MY EX-CLIENT, **STUART CLARKE!**
HE ONCE SHOWED ME **SKETCHES** OF THE EXO-SKELETON HE'S WEARING.
SO **THAT'S** HOW THE HOT-SHOT SCIENTIST INTENDED TO PAY BACK HIS CREDITORS.
WELL, A CALL TO THE POLICE WILL PAY **HIM** BACK--FOR **FIRING** ME THIS MORNING.*
NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT **AMOS CRAWLEY** ISN'T A PUBLIC-SPIRITED **ATTORNEY.**
*LAST ISSUE--MARV.

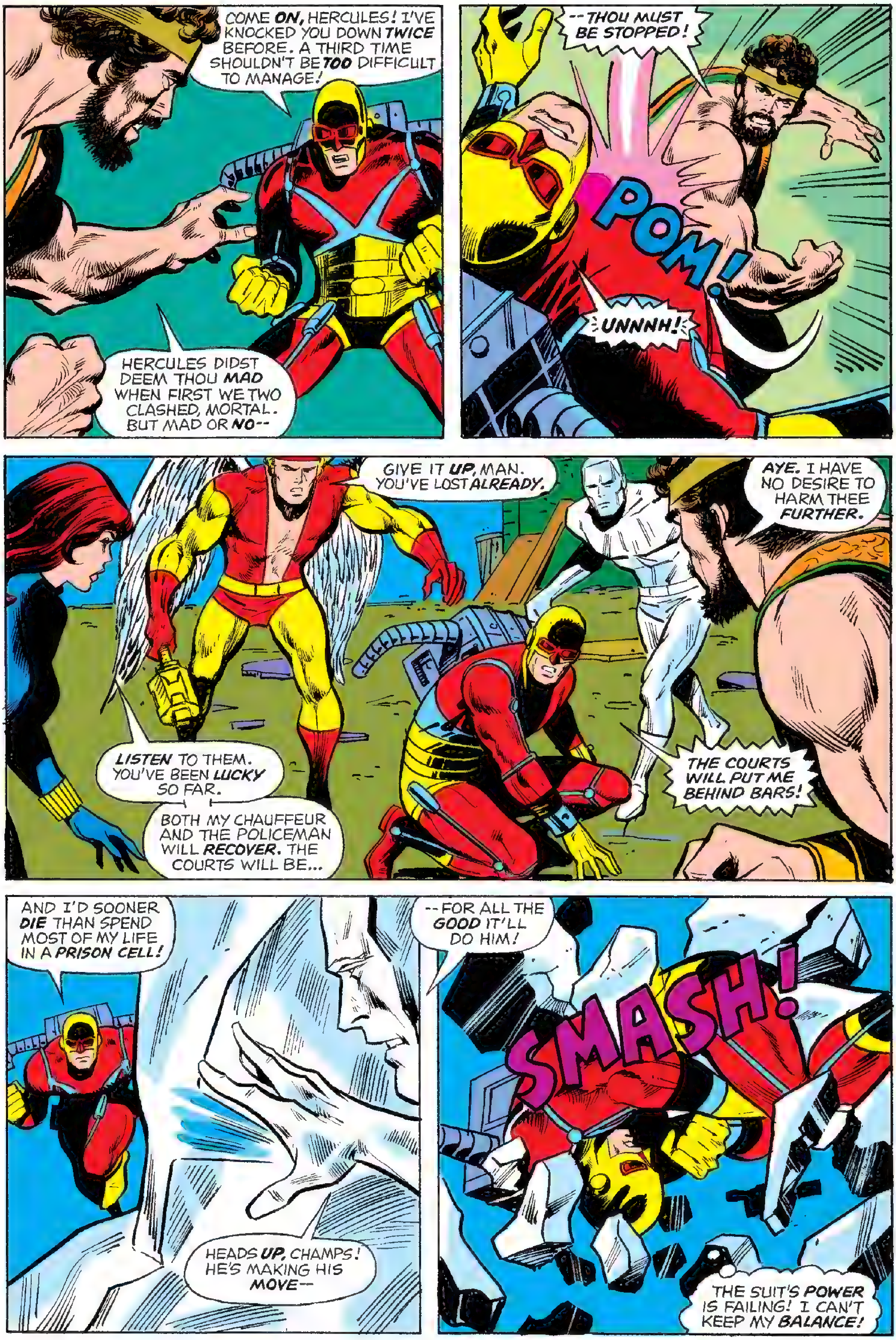

CLARKE FUTURISTICS: CALL IT A DREAM GONE BUST--JUST ONE MORE INSIGNIFICANT VICTIM OF THE RECESSION.
STUART CLARKE HAD POURED HIS SOUL INTO A VISION OF THE FUTURE, ONLY TO SEE THAT VISION DESTROYED BY INFLATION, UNFAIR COMPETITION, AND A DOZEN OTHER FACTORS BEYOND HIS CONTROL.
THE DREAM DIES SLOWLY. THE DREAMER FACES BANKRUPTCY AND IMPRISONMENT.
SING A SAD SONG FOR A DREAM GONE BUST--
--AND ADD A REFRAIN FOR THE DREAMER.
I'VE BEEN LUCKY SO FAR, BUT I'D BETTER TAKE THIS RIG APART BEFORE...
CLARKE! THIS IS THE POLICE!
GOOD LORD!
WE KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE, MR. CLARKE! COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP!
MAKE IT EASY ON YOURSELF! YOUR LABORATORY IS SURROUNDED! YOU CAN'T ESCAPE!
POLICE
I CAN'T LET THEM PUT ME IN PRISON!
BUT I CAN'T FIGHT HALF THE POLICE FORCE, EITHER. AND MY BOOT-JETS ARE TOO DAMAGED TO FLY ME TO SAFETY!
UNLESS...
THERE'S BEEN NO RESPONSE FROM INSIDE, SIR.
SHOULD WE BREAK IN?
BLAST! I HATE TO DO IT THIS WAY.
"BUT I GUESS WE DON'T REALLY HAVE MUCH CHOICE, CONNERS. TELL THE MEN TO GO IN."
HOLD IT, GUYS. I THINK I HEARD SOMETHING IN THERE--
--LIKE AN ENGINE BEING WARMED UP.

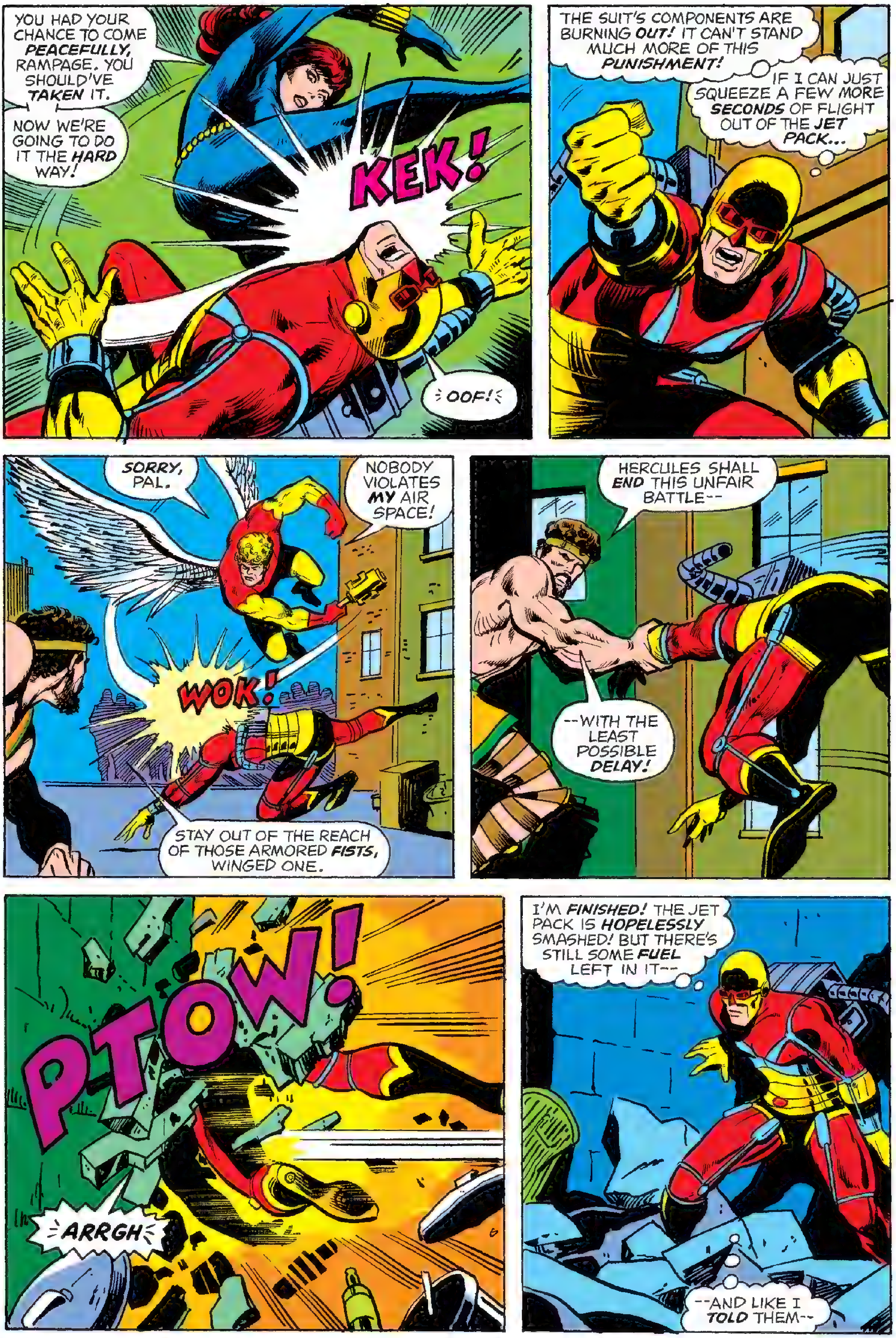

NO!
KERAASH!
I DIDN'T REALIZE THEY'D BE STANDING THIS NEAR THE DOOR!
YRRGH!
I THOUGHT THIS EXPERIMENTAL IONIC JET PACK WOULD GET ME TO SAFETY WITHOUT FORCING ME TO HARM ANYONE!
BUT NOW IT MAY HAVE MADE ME A MURDERER TWICE OVER!
THERE'S ONLY A SMALL AMOUNT OF FUEL IN THIS THING! I'LL HAVE TO LAND WITHIN MINUTES!
AND IF I HAVE KILLED THAT OFFICER, I DON'T STAND A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT OF THE CITY ALIVE!
QUICK-CUT: THE U.C.L.A. MEDICAL CENTER...
THEN THE VALIANT IVAN WILL RECOVER?
THE DOCTORS SAY HE WAS LUCKY, HERCULES.
IT'S AS IF RAMPAGE PULLED HIS PUNCHES AT THE VERY LAST SECOND.
AND JUST OUTSIDE IVAN'S ROOM...
IT'S A GOOD THING THE WIDOW STATIONED ME NEAR A RADIO!
WE'RE GONNA GET A SECOND CRACK AT RAMPAGE SOONER THAN WE FIGURED!
HE AND THE POLICE ARE HAVING A RUNNING BATTLE--

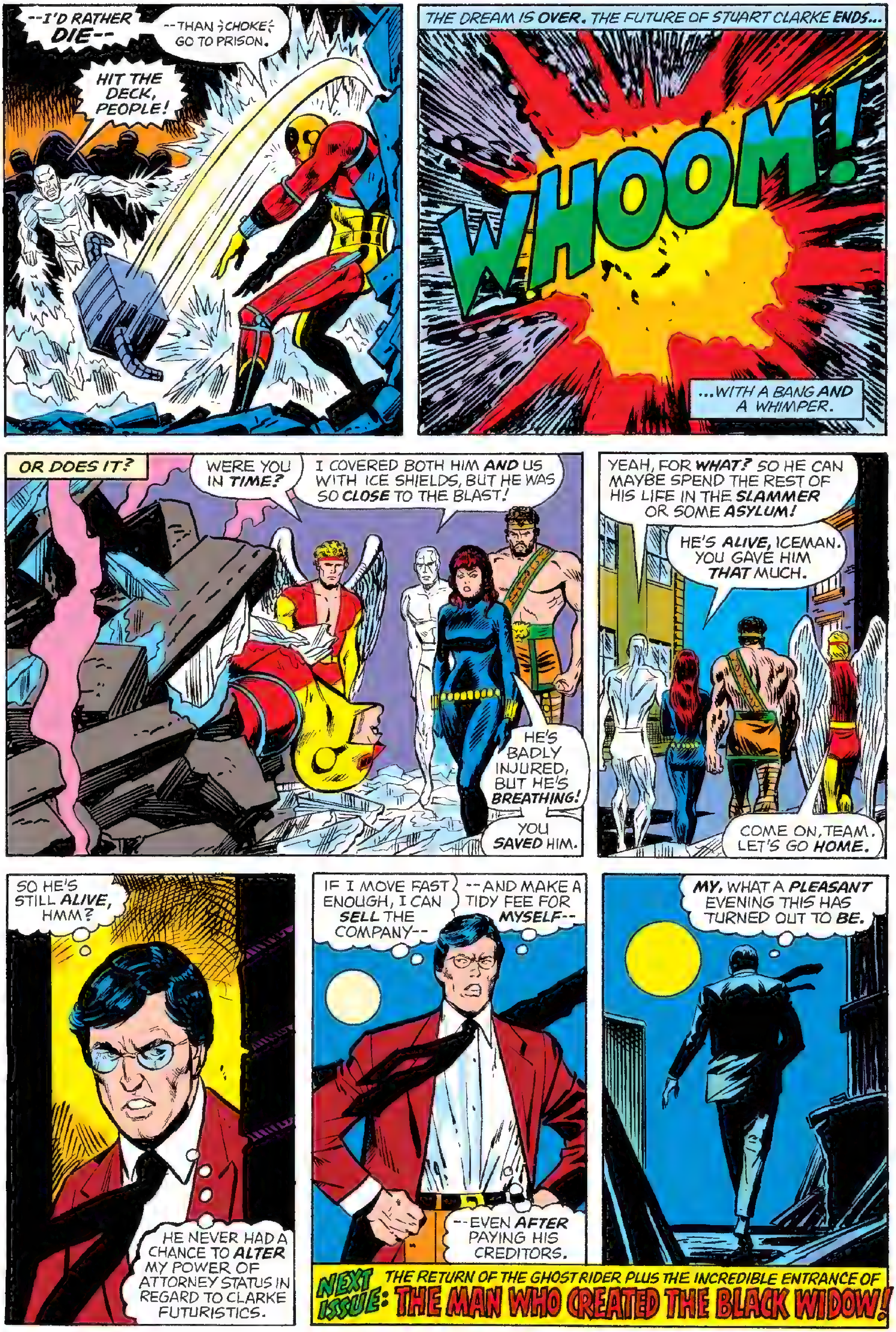

"--DOWN HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD!"
BLAM!
KRAK!
MY GOD! IT'S LIKE A BATTLEFIELD!
HOW LONG CAN I HOLD THEM OFF BY THROWING THESE HUNKS OF CONCRETE?
"HOW LONG BEFORE I ACCIDENTALLY KILL AGAIN?"
WAM!
THERE ARE NO ANSWERS TO STUART CLARKE'S UNVOICED QUESTIONS, ONLY TO THE SEEMING THREAT HE POSES...
THEY ARE, OF COURSE, THE WRONG ANSWERS...
SPANGG!
PHWIING!
KWEE!
...BUT THOSE WHO GIVE THEM HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING THIS.
WHY WON'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE?
I DON'T WANT TO KILL ANYBODY ELSE!
CAN YOU BEAT THAT? HE THINKS WE'RE JUST GONNA LET HIM WALK AWAY AFTER HE NEARLY KILLED CONNERS! STILL...
THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT HIS VOICE. MAYBE HE'S NOT AS DANGEROUS AS THEY SAY.
BETTER SPEED UP YOUR PSYCHOANALYSIS, DUNN, BECAUSE THAT CLOWN'S NUMBER JUST CAME UP! LOOK...


HERE COME THE CHAMPIONS!
THERE'S OUR PIGEON, GROUP!
YOU LEAD THE ATTACK, WARREN.
AYE, ANGEL, AND MAKE GOODLY USE OF THE GOLDEN MACE THOU DOST WIELD!
IT WAS FASHIONED BY HEPHAESTUS HIMSELF IN THE SACRED FORGE OF OLYMPUS!
NICE GOING, HERK. YOU'VE FOUND THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THE MUTANT WHO HAS EVERYTHING!
POOR, I'M NOT, FROSTBITE.
BUT AT LEAST I BELIEVE IN--
--SHARING THE WEALTH!
KLOM!
I OWED YOU THAT ONE, RAMPAGE.
BUT WE CAN END THIS BATTLE RIGHT HERE IF YOU'LL SURRENDER TO THE AUTHORITIES!
I JUST WANTED TO SLIP QUIETLY OUT OF TOWN, BUT IF I HAVE TO--
--I'LL FIGHT MY WAY OUT!
BAD MOVE, MISTER--AND YOU HAVE TO BE A LOT FASTER THAN THAT TO CATCH THE ANGEL ANYWAY...


...EVEN IF I *WEREN'T* BACKED UP BY THE ICEMAN.
ICE DAGGERS!
KEEP UP THE *BARRAGE,* ICEMAN.
HEY, I'M NOT EXACTLY *NEW* AT THIS, YA KNOW. I'LL MUDDLE THROUGH *SOMEHOW!*
*HMM...*PERHAPS I *AM* OVERPLAYING THIS LEADER ROLE.
I'D BETTER CONCENTRATE ON *MY* PART OF OUR ATTACK--
--AND STRIKE--
--AS ONLY THE BLACK WIDOW CAN!
BUNCH!
WHAT THE DEVIL?!
ALL RIGHT, HEROES. I DIDN'T *WANT* THIS, BUT IF I'M GOING TO BE *TREATED* LIKE A *SUPER-VILLAIN*--
--THEN I'LL *ACT* THE THE PART! AND I'LL BE THE DEADLIEST MENACE THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN!


COME **ON**, HERCULES! I'VE KNOCKED YOU DOWN **TWICE** BEFORE. A THIRD TIME SHOULDN'T BE **TOO** DIFFICULT TO MANAGE!
HERCULES DIDST DEEM THOU **MAD** WHEN FIRST WE TWO CLASHED, MORTAL. BUT MAD OR **NO**--
--THOU MUST BE STOPPED!
POM!
UNNNH!
GIVE IT **UP**, MAN. YOU'VE LOST **ALREADY**.
AYE. I HAVE NO DESIRE TO HARM THEE **FURTHER.**
LISTEN TO THEM. YOU'VE BEEN **LUCKY** SO FAR.
BOTH MY CHAUFFEUR AND THE POLICEMAN WILL **RECOVER**. THE COURTS WILL BE...
THE COURTS WILL PUT ME BEHIND BARS!
AND I'D SOONER **DIE** THAN SPEND MOST OF MY LIFE IN A **PRISON CELL!**
HEADS **UP**, CHAMPS! HE'S MAKING HIS **MOVE**--
--FOR ALL THE **GOOD** IT'LL DO HIM!
SMASH!
THE SUIT'S **POWER** IS FAILING! I CAN'T KEEP MY **BALANCE!**


YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE TO COME **PEACEFULLY,** RAMPAGE. YOU SHOULD'VE **TAKEN** IT.
NOW WE'RE GOING TO DO IT THE **HARD** WAY!
KEK!
OOF!
THE SUIT'S COMPONENTS ARE BURNING **OUT!** IT CAN'T STAND MUCH MORE OF THIS **PUNISHMENT!**
IF I CAN JUST SQUEEZE A FEW MORE **SECONDS** OF FLIGHT OUT OF THE **JET** PACK...
SORRY, PAL.
NOBODY VIOLATES **MY** AIR SPACE!
WOK!
STAY OUT OF THE REACH OF THOSE ARMORED **FISTS,** WINGED ONE.
HERCULES SHALL **END** THIS UNFAIR BATTLE--
--WITH THE LEAST POSSIBLE **DELAY!**
PTOW!
ARRGH
I'M **FINISHED!** THE JET PACK IS **HOPELESSLY** SMASHED! BUT THERE'S STILL SOME **FUEL** LEFT IN IT--
--AND LIKE I **TOLD** THEM--


--I'D RATHER DIE--
--THAN ⸗CHOKE⸗ GO TO PRISON.
HIT THE DECK, PEOPLE!
THE DREAM IS OVER. THE FUTURE OF STUART CLARKE ENDS...
WHOOM!
...WITH A BANG AND A WHIMPER.
OR DOES IT?
WERE YOU IN TIME?
I COVERED BOTH HIM AND US WITH ICE SHIELDS, BUT HE WAS SO CLOSE TO THE BLAST!
HE'S BADLY INJURED, BUT HE'S BREATHING!
YOU SAVED HIM.
YEAH, FOR WHAT? SO HE CAN MAYBE SPEND THE REST OF HIS LIFE IN THE SLAMMER OR SOME ASYLUM!
HE'S ALIVE, ICEMAN. YOU GAVE HIM THAT MUCH.
COME ON, TEAM. LET'S GO HOME.
SO HE'S STILL ALIVE, HMM?
HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO ALTER MY POWER OF ATTORNEY STATUS IN REGARD TO CLARKE FUTURISTICS.
IF I MOVE FAST ENOUGH, I CAN SELL THE COMPANY--
--AND MAKE A TIDY FEE FOR MYSELF--
--EVEN AFTER PAYING HIS CREDITORS.
MY, WHAT A PLEASANT EVENING THIS HAS TURNED OUT TO BE.
NEXT ISSUE: THE RETURN OF THE GHOST RIDER PLUS THE INCREDIBLE ENTRANCE OF THE MAN WHO CREATED THE BLACK WIDOW!

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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS™
TM
YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE GRIFFIN, CHAMPION--
--AND WAIT'LL YOU FACE THE REST OF MY TEAM!
IN THIS INCREDIBLE ISSUE YOU WILL MEET THE MAN WHO CREATED THE BLACK WIDOW!

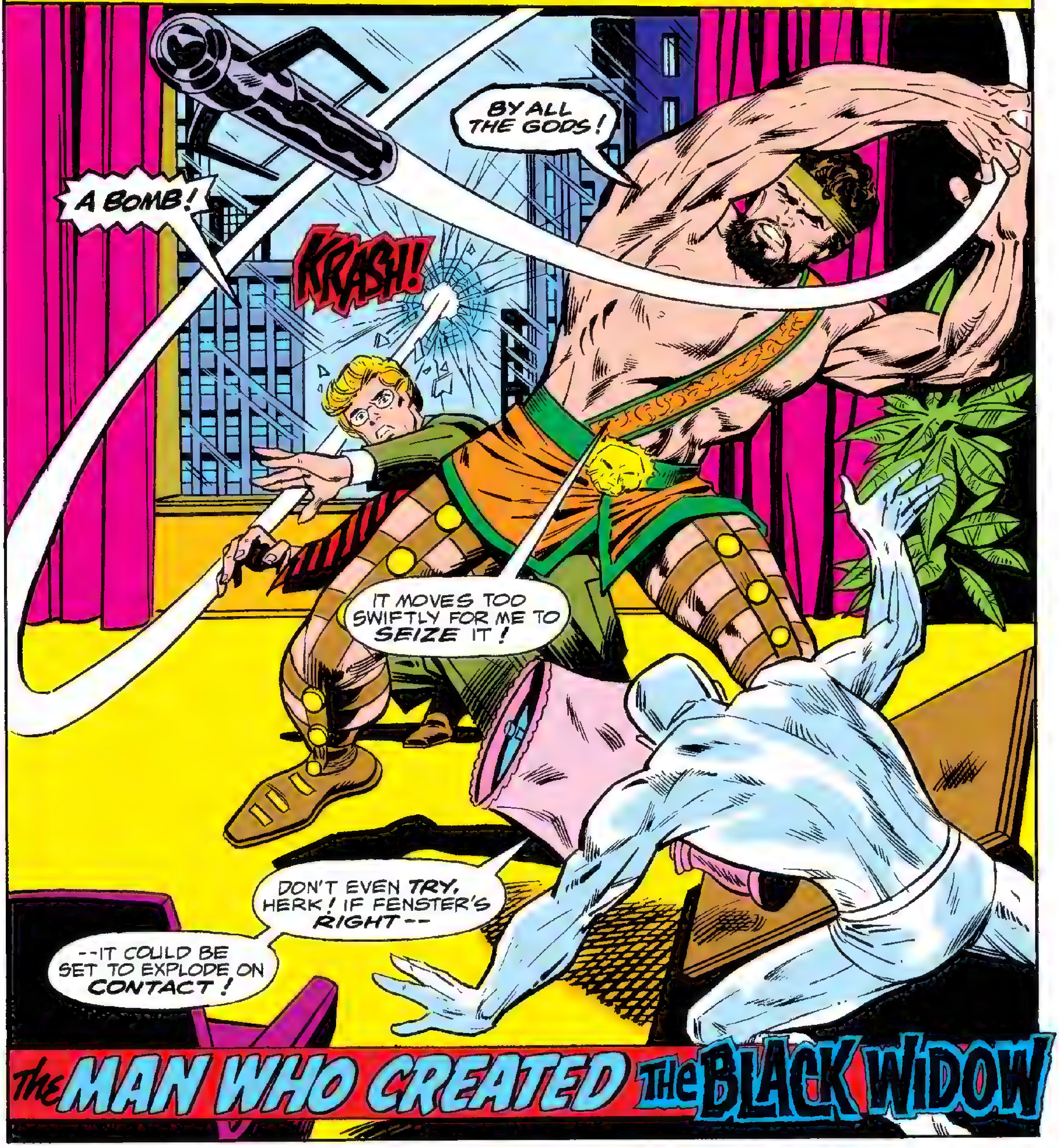
The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

Stan Lee PRESENTS:

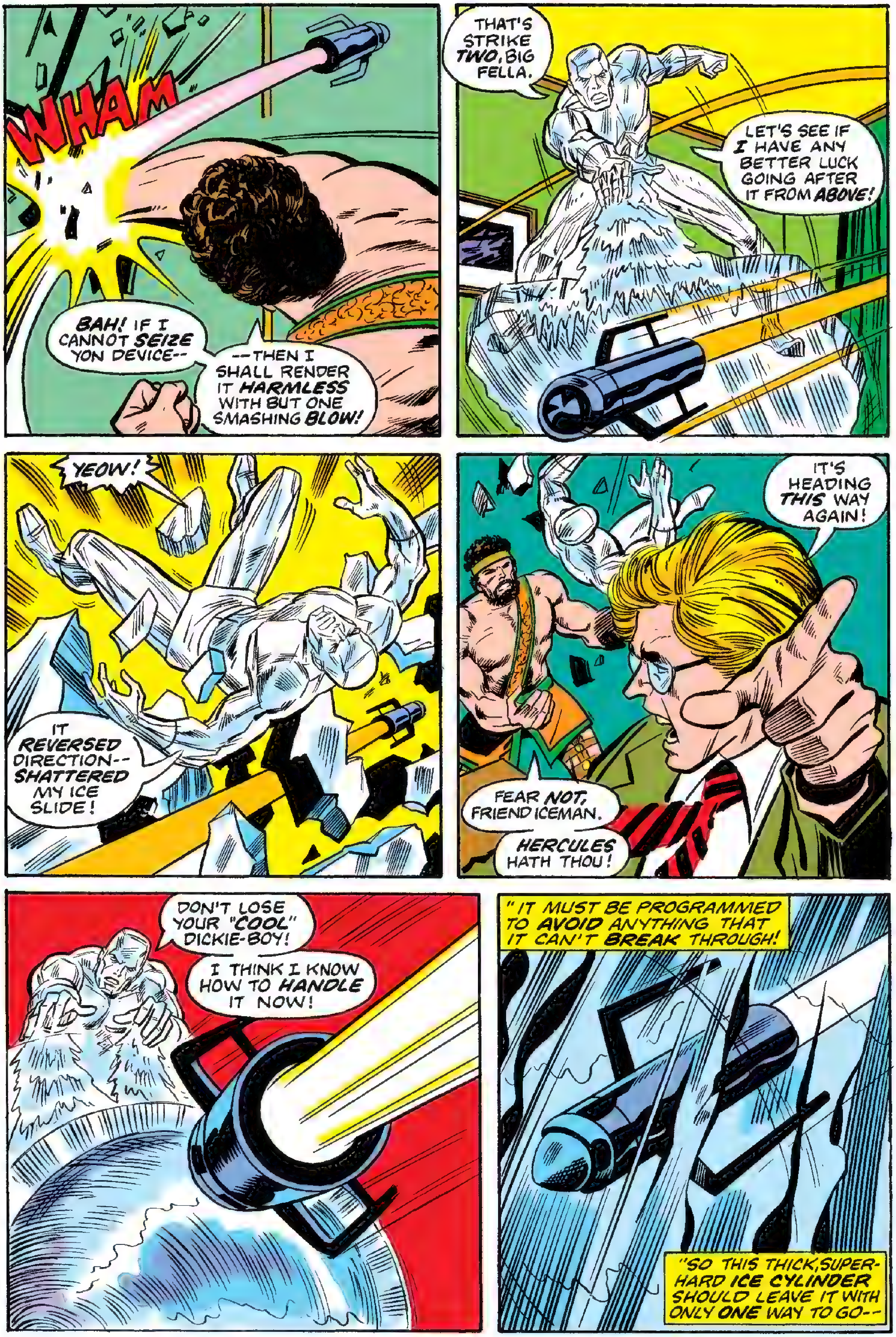
THE CHAMPIONS™

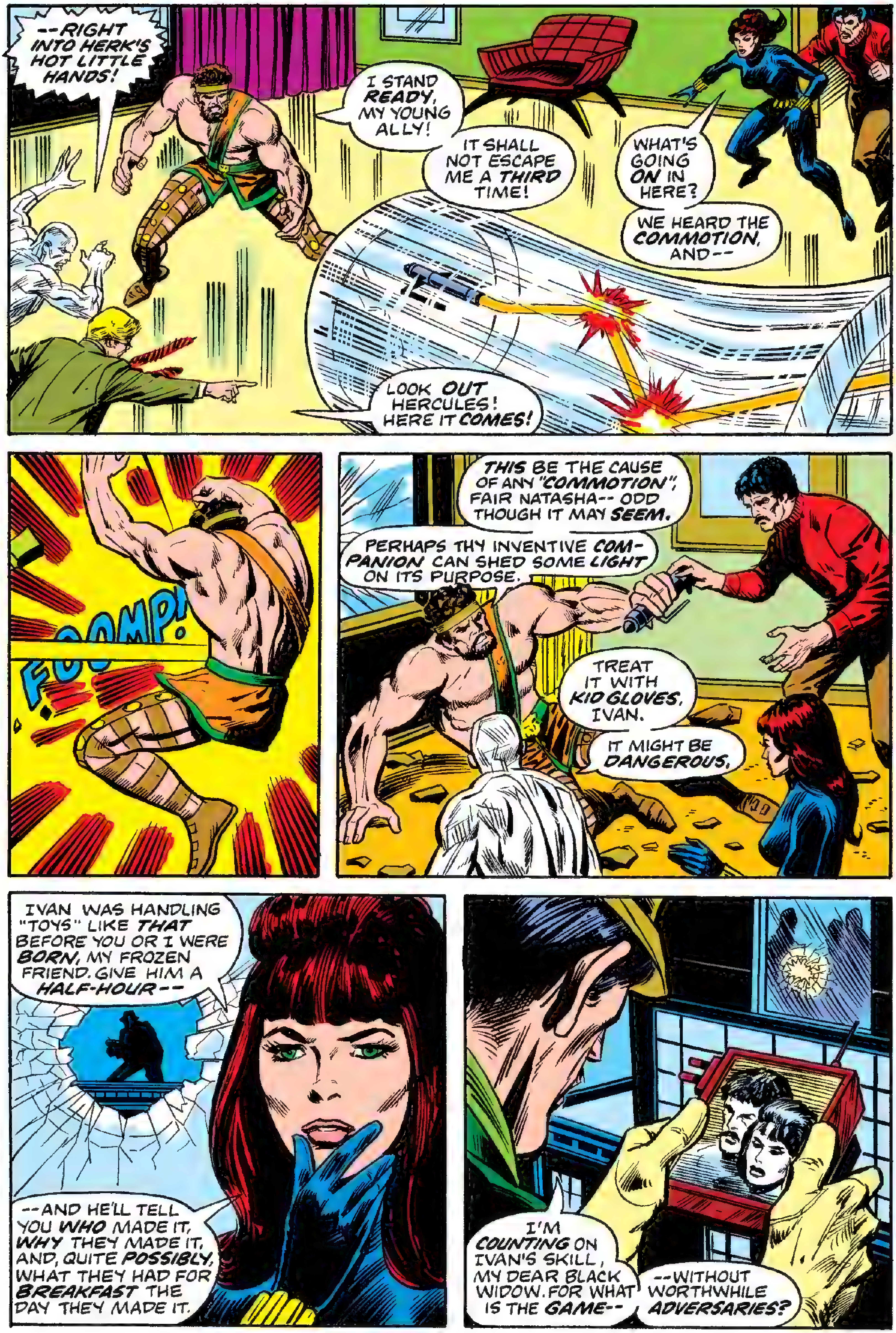
TONY ISABELLA, WRITER | GEORGE TUSKA, ARTIST | VINCE COLLETTA, INKER | K. MANTLO, LETTERER | PHIL RACHE, COLORIST | M. WOLFMAN, EDITOR

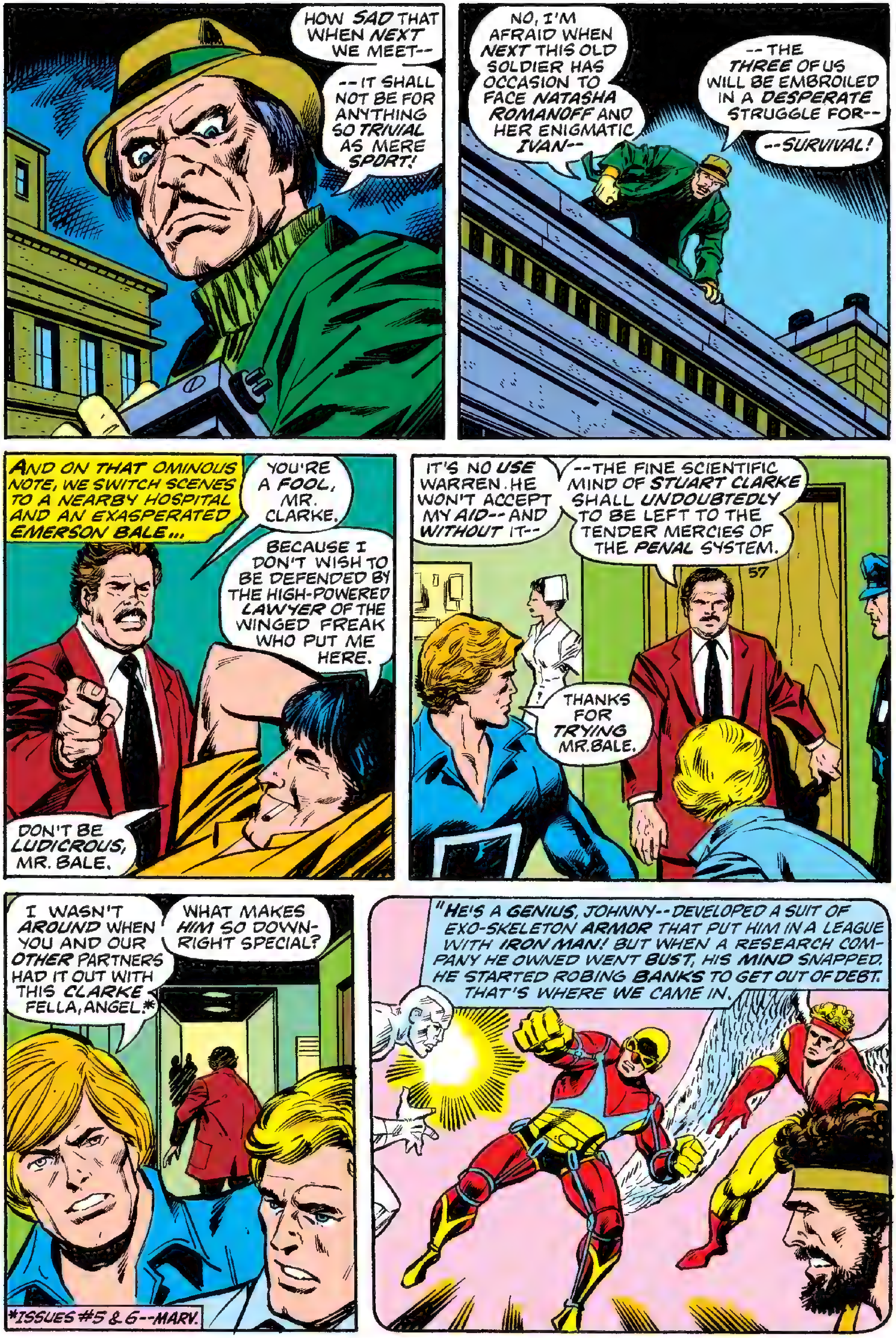
WELCOME TO THE CHAMPIONS' TEMPORARY HEADQUARTERS, A PLUSH SUITE IN A TWENTY-THREE STORY TOP-DOLLAR LOS ANGELES OFFICE BUILDING WHOSE **FIRST VISITOR** HAS QUITE **SURPRISINGLY** TURNED OUT TO BE...

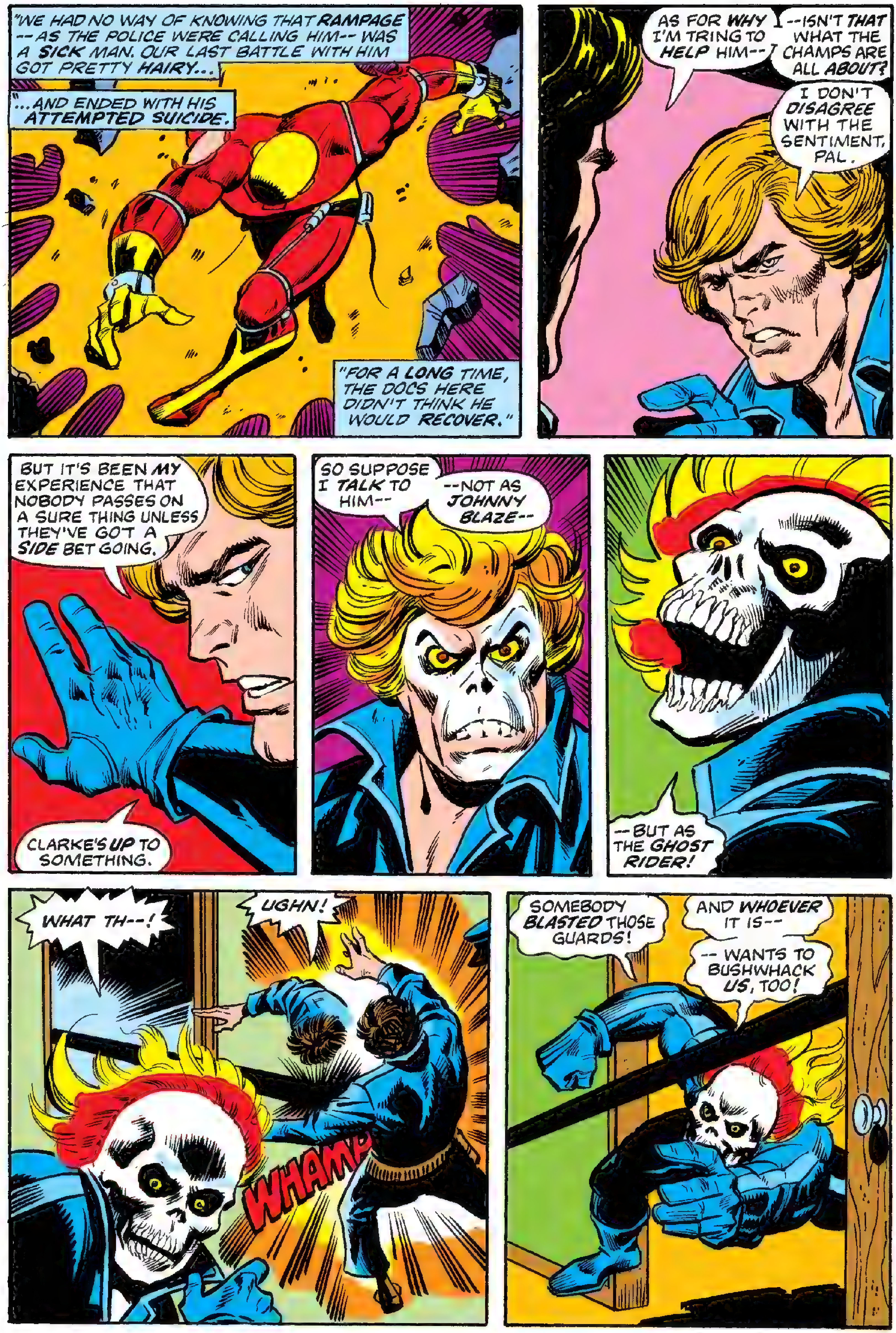

BY ALL THE GODS!
A BOMB!
KRASH!
IT MOVES TOO SWIFTLY FOR ME TO SEIZE IT!
DON'T EVEN TRY, HERK! IF FENSTER'S RIGHT--
--IT COULD BE SET TO EXPLODE ON CONTACT!

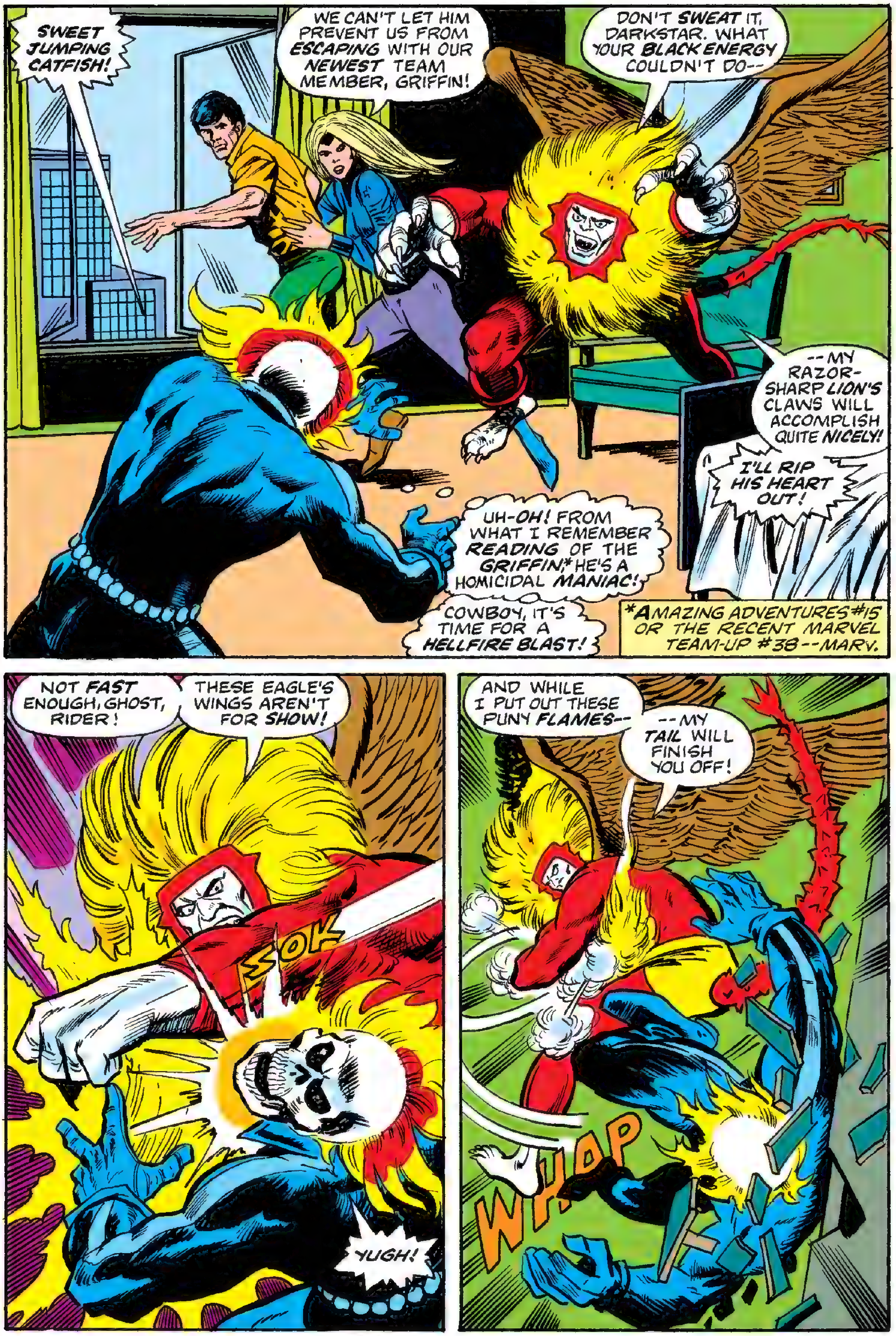
THE MAN WHO CREATED THE BLACK WIDOW

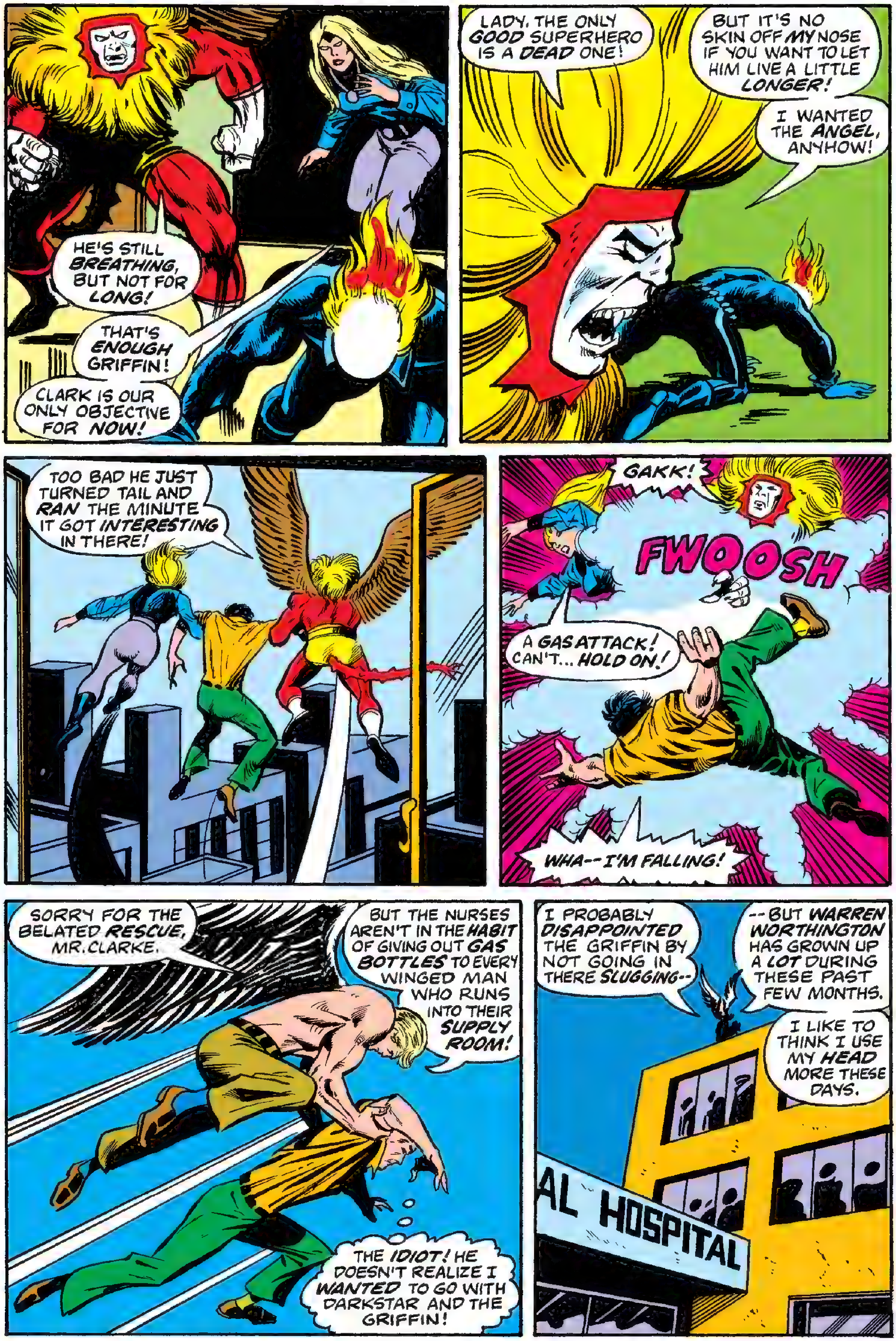

WHAM
BAH! IF I CANNOT SEIZE YON DEVICE--
--THEN I SHALL RENDER IT HARMLESS WITH BUT ONE SMASHING BLOW!
THAT'S STRIKE TWO, BIG FELLA.
LET'S SEE IF I HAVE ANY BETTER LUCK GOING AFTER IT FROM ABOVE!
YEOW!
IT REVERSED DIRECTION-- SHATTERED MY ICE SLIDE!
IT'S HEADING THIS WAY AGAIN!
FEAR NOT, FRIEND ICEMAN.
HERCULES HATH THOU!
DON'T LOSE YOUR "COOL" DICKIE-BOY!
I THINK I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE IT NOW!
"IT MUST BE PROGRAMMED TO AVOID ANYTHING THAT IT CAN'T BREAK THROUGH!
"SO THIS THICK, SUPER-HARD ICE CYLINDER SHOULD LEAVE IT WITH ONLY ONE WAY TO GO--

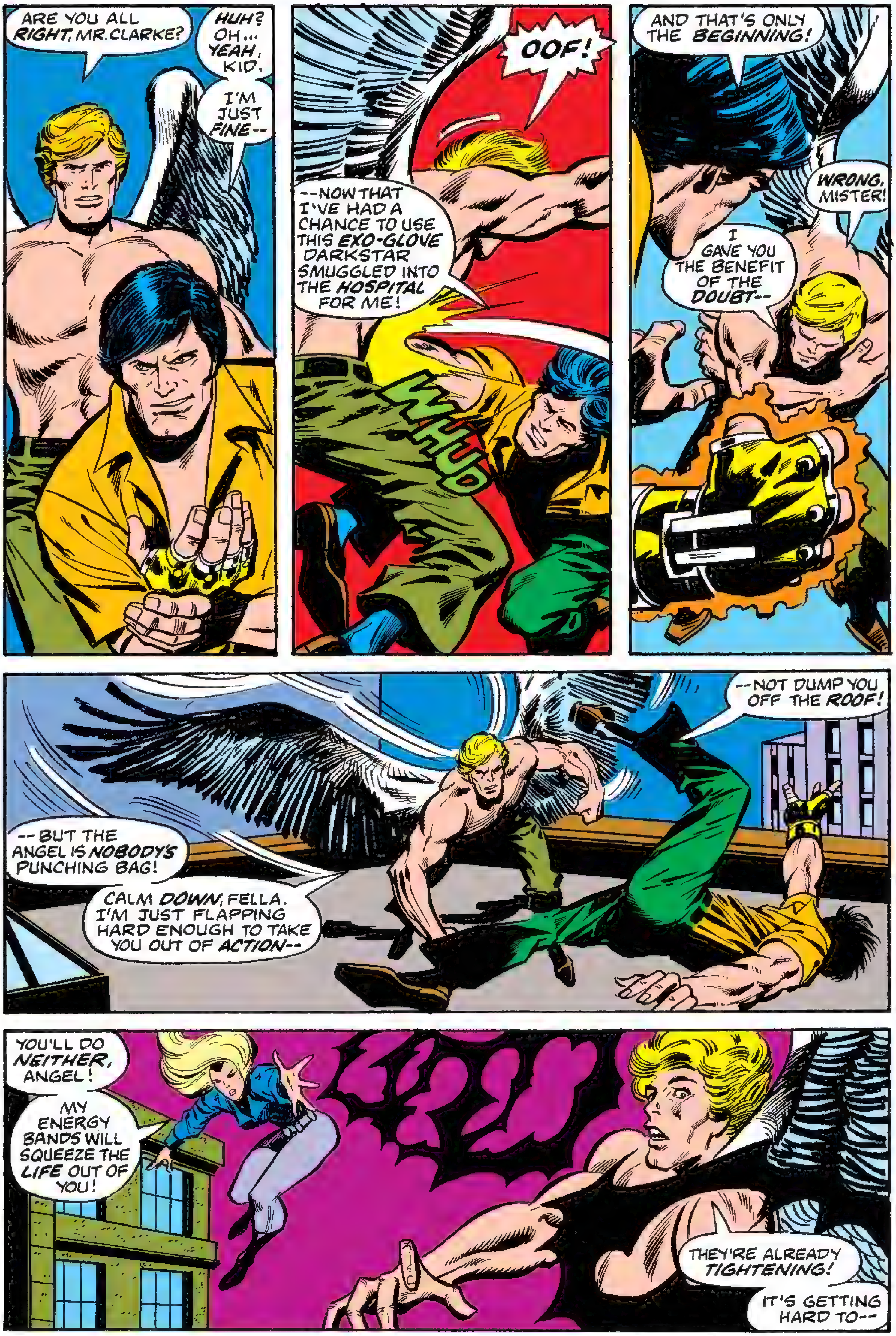

--RIGHT INTO HERK'S HOT LITTLE HANDS!
I STAND READY, MY YOUNG ALLY!
IT SHALL NOT ESCAPE ME A THIRD TIME!
WHAT'S GOING ON IN HERE?
WE HEARD THE COMMOTION, AND--
LOOK OUT HERCULES! HERE IT COMES!
FOOMP!
THIS BE THE CAUSE OF ANY "COMMOTION", FAIR NATASHA-- ODD THOUGH IT MAY SEEM.
PERHAPS THY INVENTIVE COMPANION CAN SHED SOME LIGHT ON ITS PURPOSE.
TREAT IT WITH KID GLOVES, IVAN.
IT MIGHT BE DANGEROUS.
IVAN WAS HANDLING "TOYS" LIKE THAT BEFORE YOU OR I WERE BORN, MY FROZEN FRIEND. GIVE HIM A HALF-HOUR--
--AND HE'LL TELL YOU WHO MADE IT, WHY THEY MADE IT, AND, QUITE POSSIBLY, WHAT THEY HAD FOR BREAKFAST THE DAY THEY MADE IT.
I'M COUNTING ON IVAN'S SKILL, MY DEAR BLACK WIDOW. FOR WHAT IS THE GAME--
--WITHOUT WORTHWHILE ADVERSARIES?

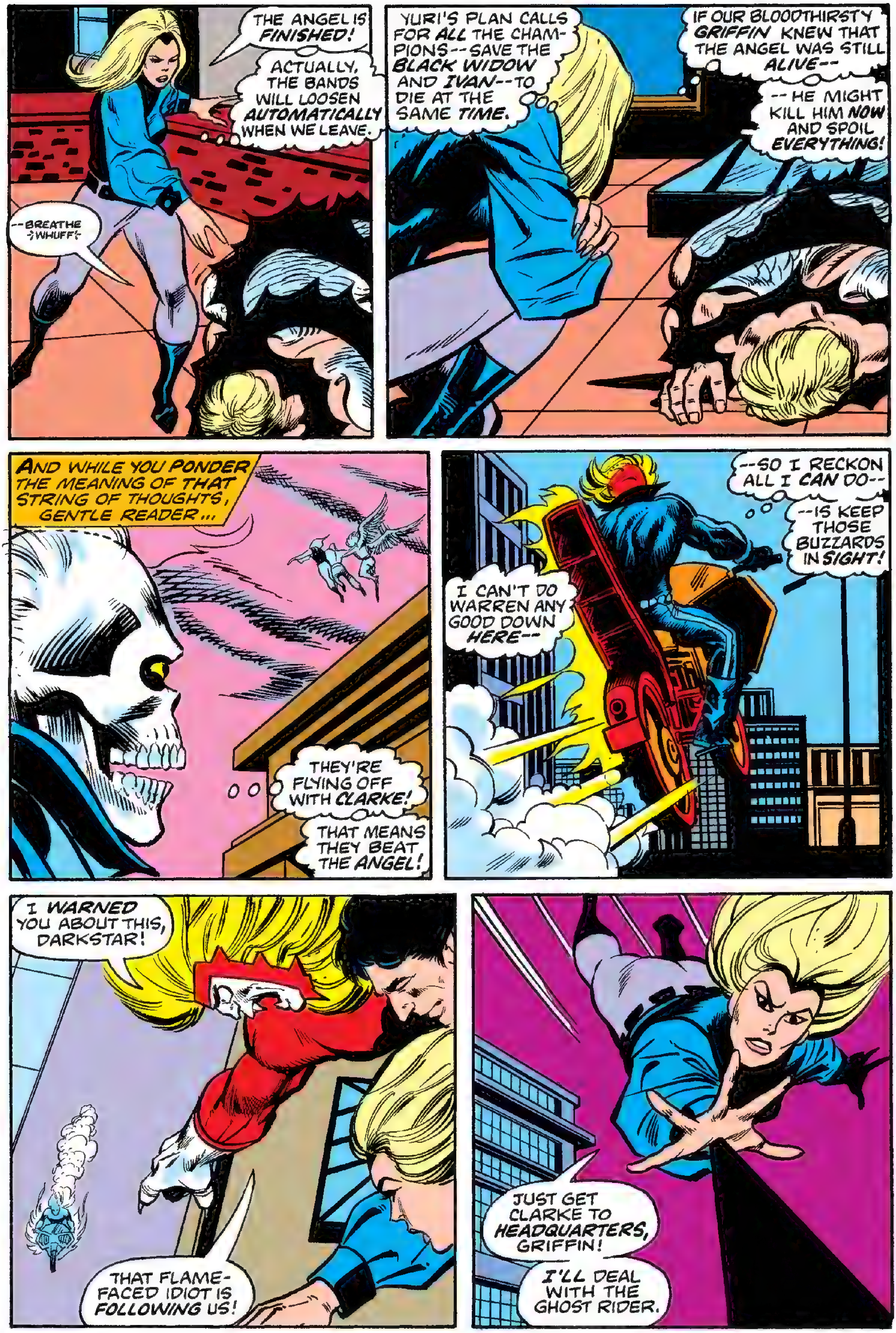

HOW *SAD* THAT WHEN *NEXT* WE MEET--
--IT SHALL NOT BE FOR ANYTHING SO *TRIVIAL* AS MERE *SPORT!*
NO, I'M AFRAID WHEN *NEXT* THIS OLD SOLDIER HAS OCCASION TO FACE *NATASHA ROMANOFF* AND HER ENIGMATIC *IVAN*--
-- THE *THREE* OF US WILL BE EMBROILED IN A *DESPERATE* STRUGGLE FOR--
--*SURVIVAL!*
AND ON THAT OMINOUS NOTE, WE SWITCH SCENES TO A NEARBY HOSPITAL AND AN EXASPERATED EMERSON BALE...
YOU'RE A *FOOL*, MR. CLARKE.
BECAUSE I DON'T WISH TO BE DEFENDED BY THE HIGH-POWERED *LAWYER* OF THE WINGED FREAK WHO PUT ME HERE.
DON'T BE *LUDICROUS*, MR. BALE.
IT'S NO *USE* WARREN. HE WON'T ACCEPT MY *AID*-- AND *WITHOUT* IT--
--THE FINE SCIENTIFIC MIND OF *STUART CLARKE* SHALL *UNDOUBTEDLY* TO BE LEFT TO THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE *PENAL* SYSTEM.
57
THANKS FOR *TRYING* MR. BALE.
I WASN'T *AROUND* WHEN YOU AND OUR *OTHER* PARTNERS HAD IT OUT WITH THIS *CLARKE* FELLA, ANGEL.*
WHAT MAKES *HIM* SO DOWN-RIGHT SPECIAL?
*ISSUES #5 & 6--MARV.
"*HE'S A GENIUS*, JOHNNY--DEVELOPED A SUIT OF EXO-SKELETON *ARMOR* THAT PUT HIM IN A LEAGUE WITH *IRON MAN!* BUT WHEN A RESEARCH COMPANY HE OWNED WENT *BUST*, HIS *MIND* SNAPPED. HE STARTED ROBING *BANKS* TO GET OUT OF DEBT. THAT'S WHERE *WE* CAME IN.

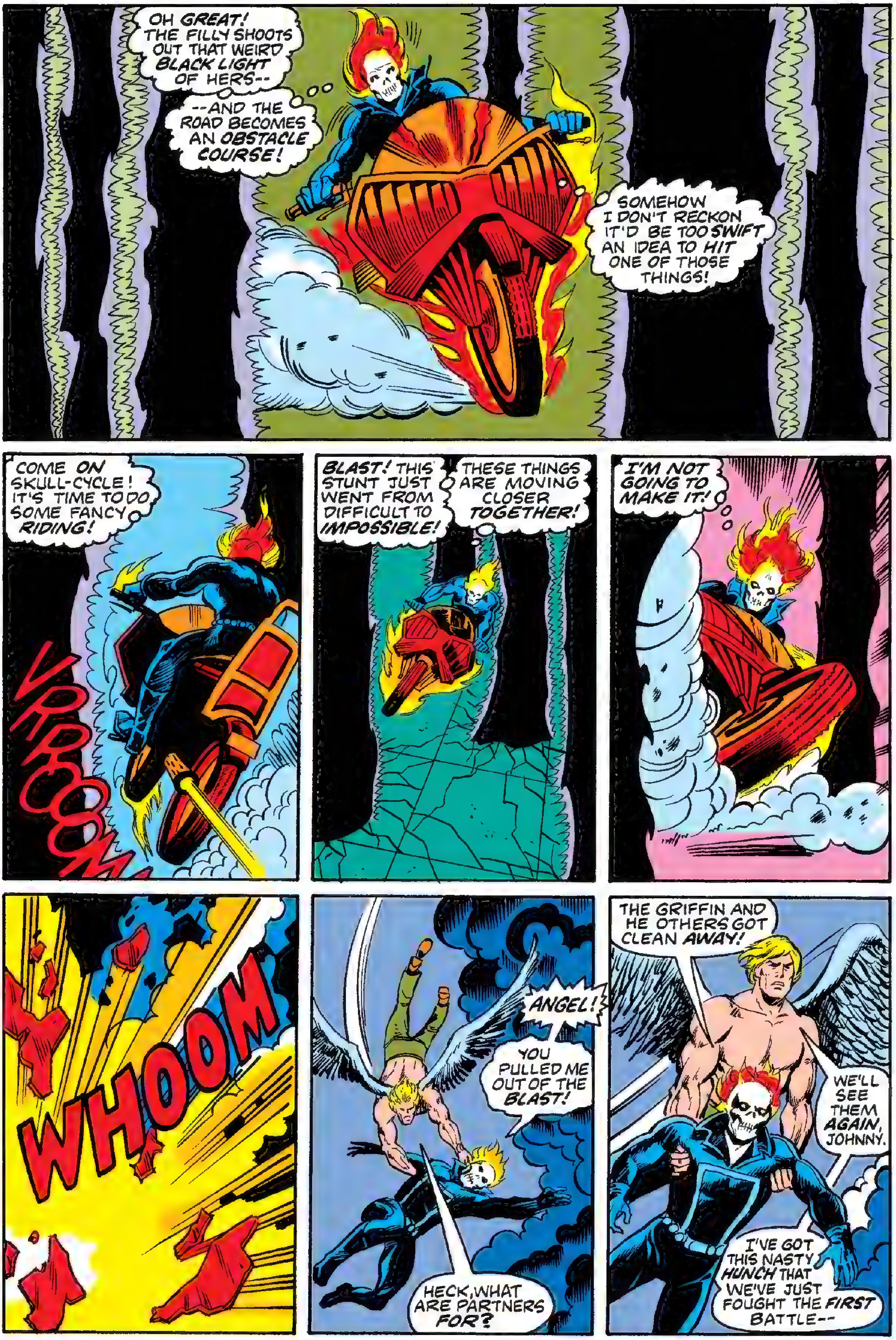

"WE HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT **RAMPAGE** -- AS THE POLICE WERE CALLING HIM-- WAS A **SICK** MAN. OUR LAST BATTLE WITH HIM GOT PRETTY **HAIRY**...
"...AND ENDED WITH HIS **ATTEMPTED SUICIDE**.
"FOR A **LONG** TIME, THE DOCS HERE DIDN'T THINK HE WOULD **RECOVER**."
AS FOR **WHY** I'M TRING TO **HELP** HIM--
--ISN'T **THAT** WHAT THE CHAMPS ARE ALL **ABOUT?**
I DON'T **DISAGREE** WITH THE SENTIMENT, PAL.
BUT IT'S BEEN **MY** EXPERIENCE THAT NOBODY PASSES ON A SURE THING UNLESS THEY'VE GOT A **SIDE** BET GOING.
CLARKE'S **UP** TO SOMETHING.
SO SUPPOSE I **TALK** TO HIM--
--NOT AS **JOHNNY BLAZE**--
--BUT AS THE **GHOST RIDER!**
WHAT TH--!
UGHN!
WHAM!
SOMEBODY **BLASTED** THOSE GUARDS!
AND **WHOEVER** IT IS--
-- WANTS TO BUSHWHACK **US**, TOO!

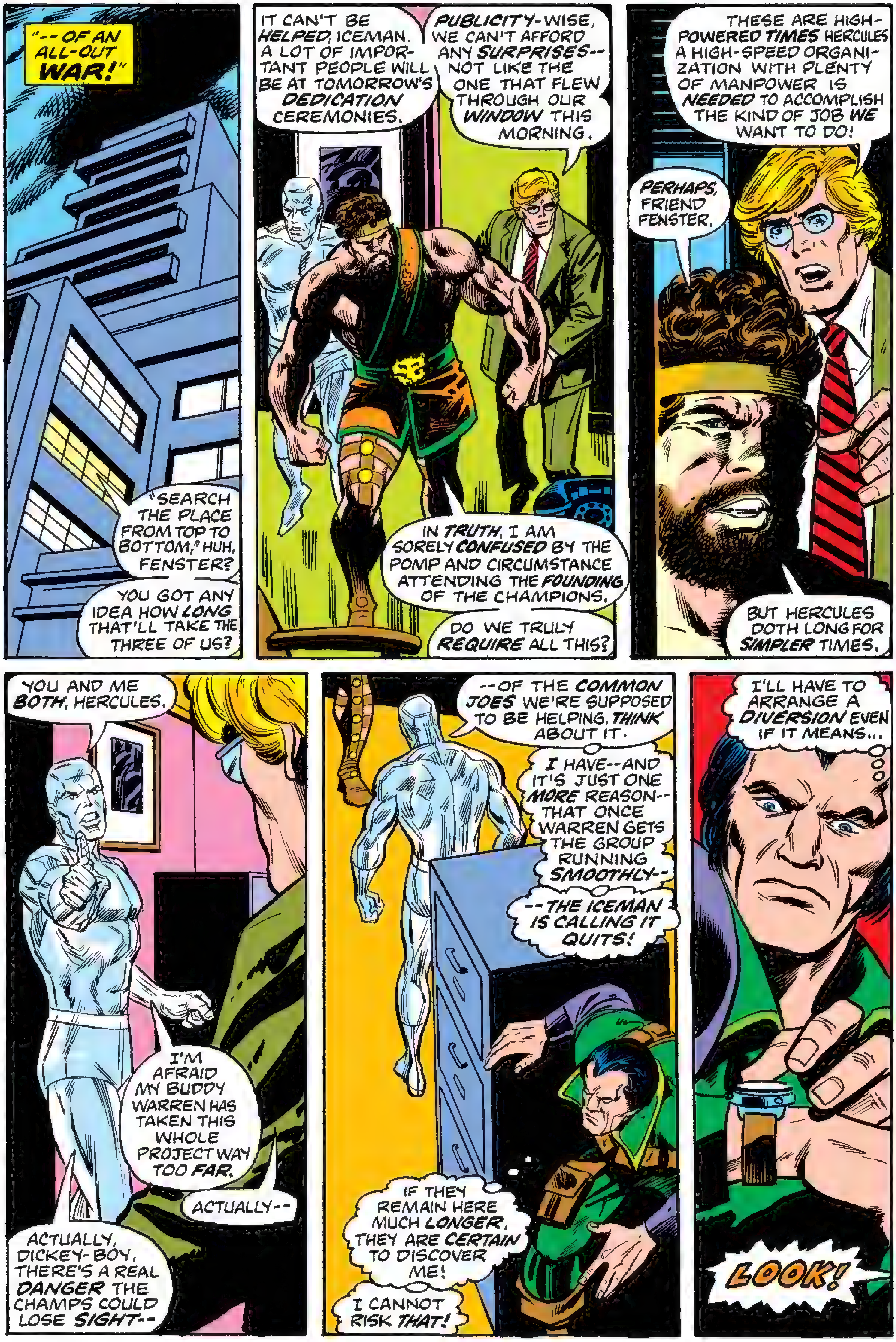

SWEET JUMPING CATFISH!
WE CAN'T LET HIM PREVENT US FROM ESCAPING WITH OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBER, GRIFFIN!
DON'T SWEAT IT, DARKSTAR. WHAT YOUR BLACK ENERGY COULDN'T DO--
--MY RAZOR-SHARP LION'S CLAWS WILL ACCOMPLISH QUITE NICELY!
I'LL RIP HIS HEART OUT!
UH-OH! FROM WHAT I REMEMBER READING OF THE GRIFFIN,* HE'S A HOMICIDAL MANIAC!
COWBOY, IT'S TIME FOR A HELLFIRE BLAST!
*AMAZING ADVENTURES #15 OR THE RECENT MARVEL TEAM-UP #38--MARV.
NOT FAST ENOUGH, GHOST, RIDER!
THESE EAGLE'S WINGS AREN'T FOR SHOW!
SOK
YUGH!
AND WHILE I PUT OUT THESE PUNY FLAMES--
--MY TAIL WILL FINISH YOU OFF!
WHAP

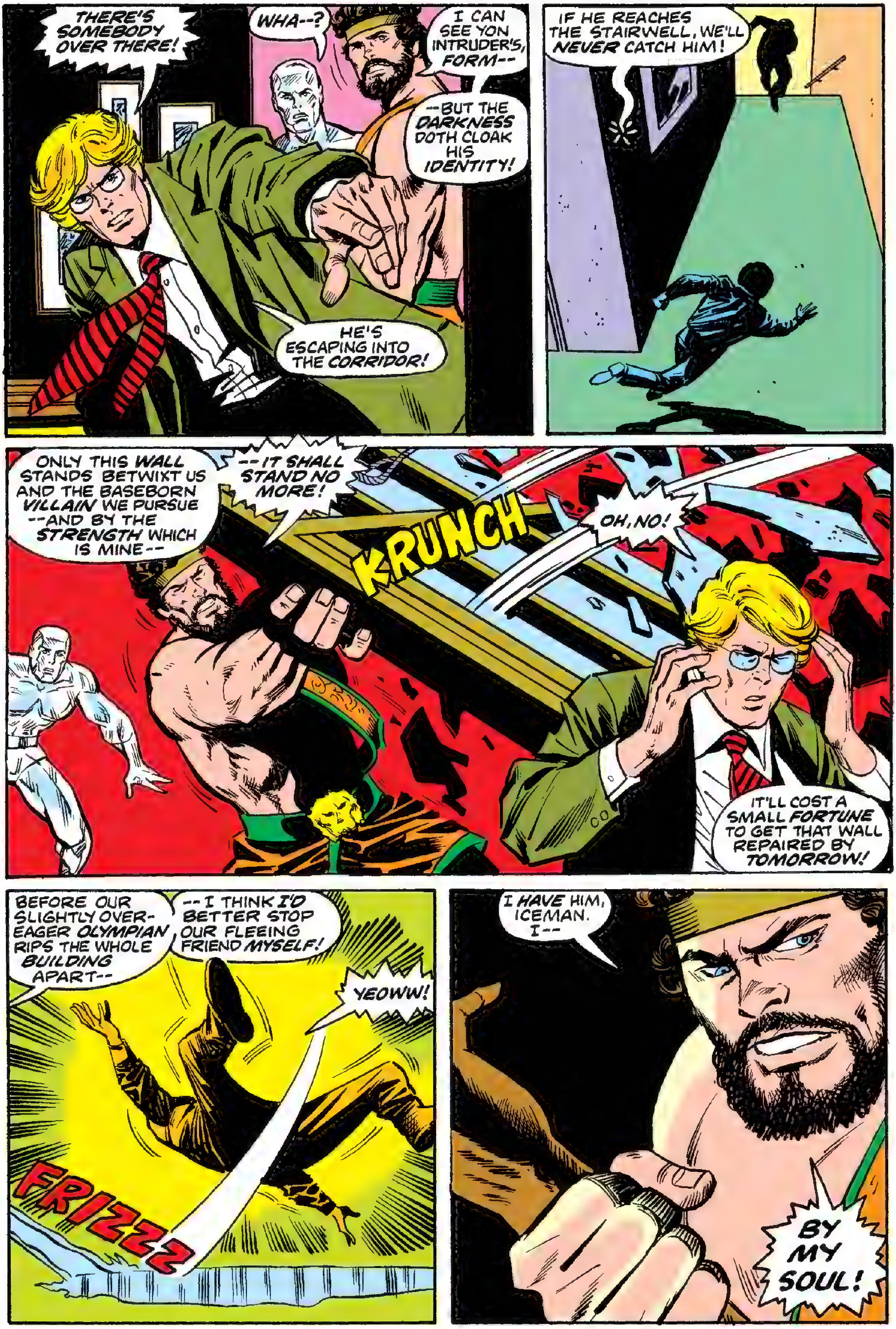

HE'S STILL BREATHING, BUT NOT FOR LONG!
THAT'S ENOUGH GRIFFIN!
CLARK IS OUR ONLY OBJECTIVE FOR NOW!
LADY, THE ONLY GOOD SUPERHERO IS A DEAD ONE!
BUT IT'S NO SKIN OFF MY NOSE IF YOU WANT TO LET HIM LIVE A LITTLE LONGER!
I WANTED THE ANGEL, ANYHOW!
TOO BAD HE JUST TURNED TAIL AND RAN THE MINUTE IT GOT INTERESTING IN THERE!
GAKK!
FWOOSH
A GAS ATTACK! CAN'T... HOLD ON!
WHA--I'M FALLING!
SORRY FOR THE BELATED RESCUE, MR. CLARKE.
BUT THE NURSES AREN'T IN THE HABIT OF GIVING OUT GAS BOTTLES TO EVERY WINGED MAN WHO RUNS INTO THEIR SUPPLY ROOM!
THE IDIOT! HE DOESN'T REALIZE I WANTED TO GO WITH DARKSTAR AND THE GRIFFIN!
I PROBABLY DISAPPOINTED THE GRIFFIN BY NOT GOING IN THERE SLUGGING--
--BUT WARREN WORTHINGTON HAS GROWN UP A LOT DURING THESE PAST FEW MONTHS.
I LIKE TO THINK I USE MY HEAD MORE THESE DAYS.
AL HOSPITAL

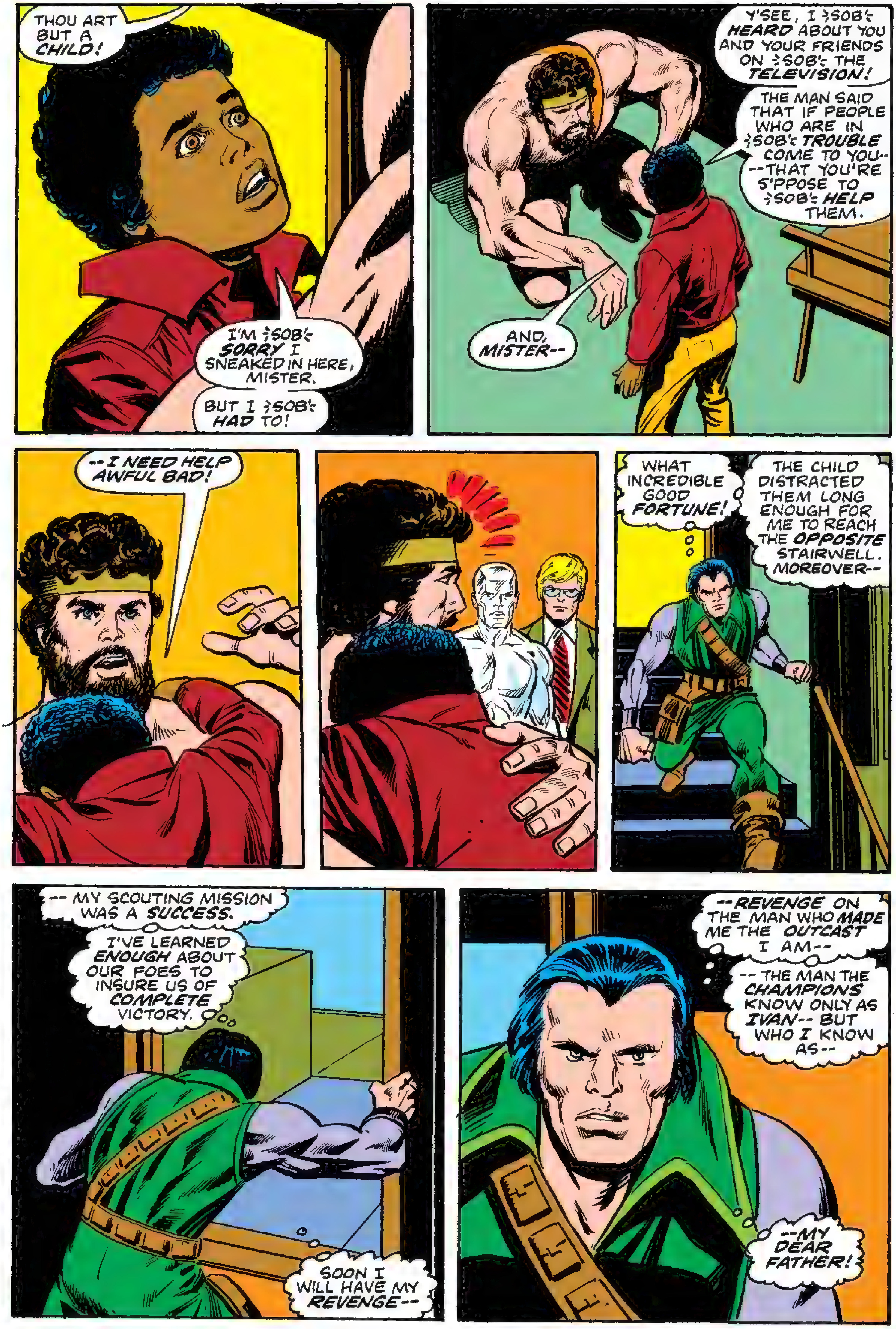

ARE YOU ALL *RIGHT*, MR. CLARKE?
HUH? OH... *YEAH*, KID.
I'M JUST *FINE*--
OOF!
--NOW THAT I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO USE THIS *EXO-GLOVE* DARKSTAR SMUGGLED INTO THE *HOSPITAL* FOR ME!
WHUD
AND THAT'S ONLY THE *BEGINNING!*
WRONG, MISTER!
I GAVE YOU THE BENEFIT OF THE *DOUBT*--
--BUT THE ANGEL IS *NOBODY'S* PUNCHING BAG!
CALM *DOWN*, FELLA. I'M JUST FLAPPING HARD ENOUGH TO TAKE YOU OUT OF *ACTION*--
--NOT DUMP YOU OFF THE *ROOF!*
YOU'LL DO *NEITHER*, ANGEL!
MY ENERGY BANDS WILL SQUEEZE THE *LIFE* OUT OF YOU!
THEY'RE ALREADY *TIGHTENING!*
IT'S GETTING HARD TO--

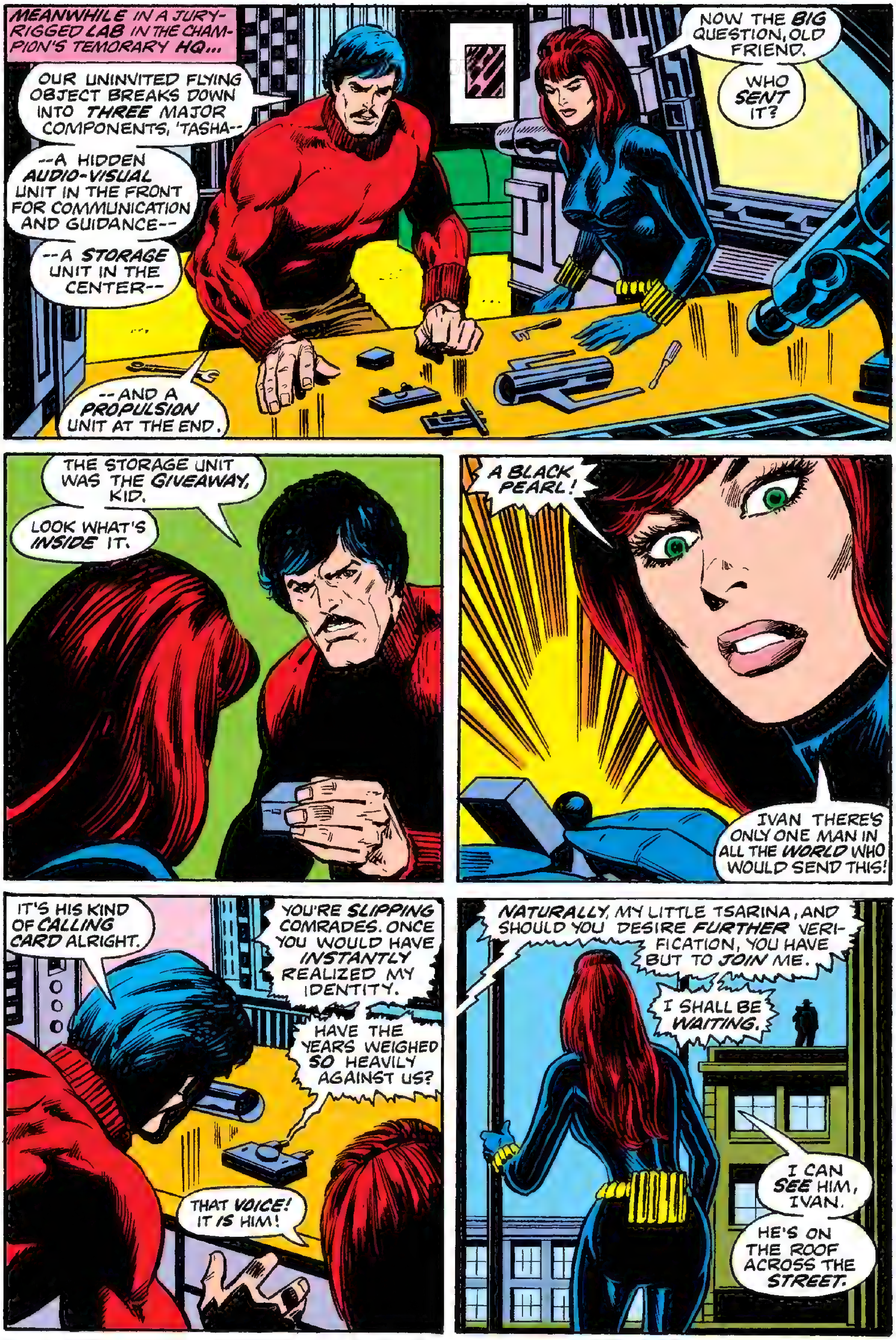

THE ANGEL IS *FINISHED!*
ACTUALLY, THE BANDS WILL LOOSEN *AUTOMATICALLY* WHEN WE LEAVE.
--BREATHE ⁓WHUFF⁓
YURI'S PLAN CALLS FOR *ALL* THE CHAMPIONS--SAVE THE *BLACK WIDOW* AND *IVAN*--TO DIE AT THE SAME *TIME.*
IF OUR BLOODTHIRSTY *GRIFFIN* KNEW THAT THE ANGEL WAS STILL *ALIVE*--
--HE MIGHT KILL HIM *NOW* AND SPOIL *EVERYTHING!*
AND WHILE YOU PONDER THE MEANING OF THAT STRING OF THOUGHTS, GENTLE READER...
THEY'RE FLYING OFF WITH *CLARKE!*
THAT MEANS THEY BEAT THE *ANGEL!*
I CAN'T DO WARREN ANY GOOD DOWN *HERE*--
--SO I RECKON ALL I *CAN* DO--
--IS KEEP THOSE BUZZARDS IN *SIGHT!*
I *WARNED* YOU ABOUT THIS, DARKSTAR!
THAT FLAME-FACED IDIOT IS *FOLLOWING* US!
JUST GET CLARKE TO *HEADQUARTERS,* GRIFFIN!
I'LL DEAL WITH THE GHOST RIDER.

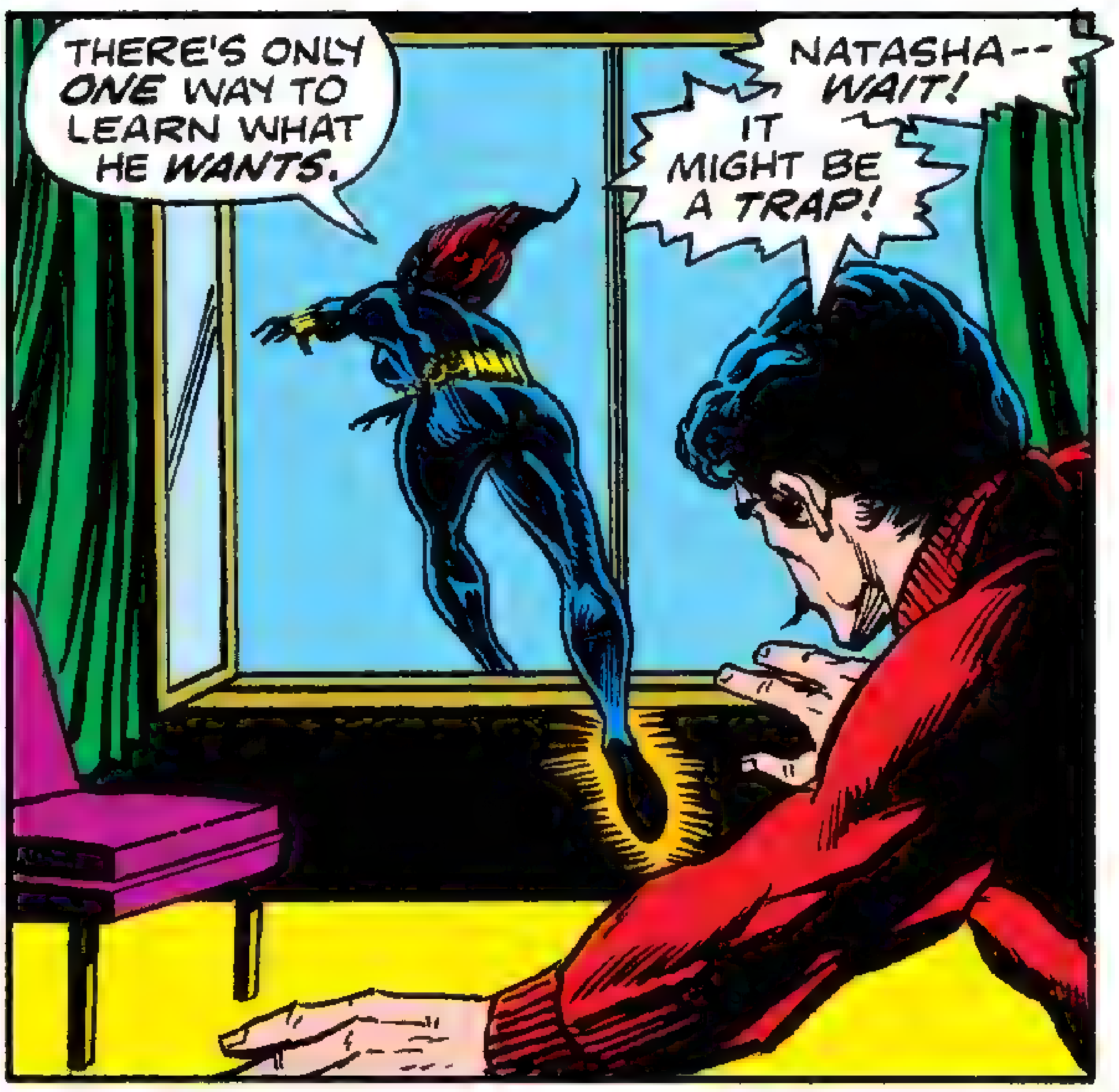

OH GREAT! THE FILLY SHOOTS OUT THAT WEIRD BLACK LIGHT OF HERS--
--AND THE ROAD BECOMES AN OBSTACLE COURSE!
SOMEHOW I DON'T RECKON IT'D BE TOO SWIFT AN IDEA TO HIT ONE OF THOSE THINGS!
COME ON SKULL-CYCLE! IT'S TIME TO DO SOME FANCY RIDING!
VRROOOM
BLAST! THIS STUNT JUST WENT FROM DIFFICULT TO IMPOSSIBLE!
THESE THINGS ARE MOVING CLOSER TOGETHER!
I'M NOT GOING TO MAKE IT!
WHOOM
ANGEL!
YOU PULLED ME OUT OF THE BLAST!
HECK, WHAT ARE PARTNERS FOR?
THE GRIFFIN AND HE OTHERS GOT CLEAN AWAY!
WE'LL SEE THEM AGAIN, JOHNNY.
I'VE GOT THIS NASTY HUNCH THAT WE'VE JUST FOUGHT THE FIRST BATTLE--

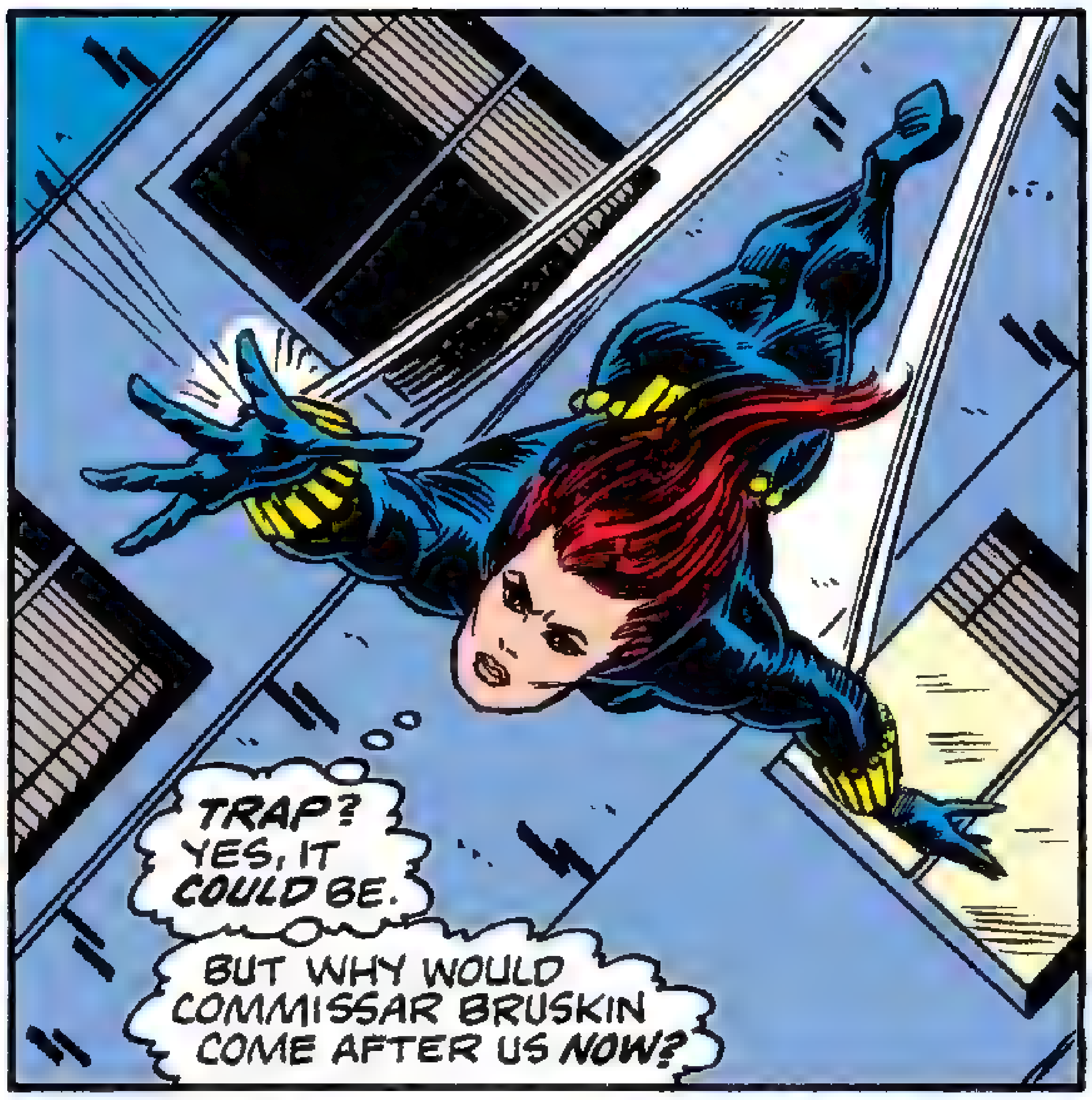

"-- OF AN ALL-OUT WAR!"
"SEARCH THE PLACE FROM TOP TO BOTTOM," HUH, FENSTER?
YOU GOT ANY IDEA HOW LONG THAT'LL TAKE THE THREE OF US?
IT CAN'T BE HELPED, ICEMAN. A LOT OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE WILL BE AT TOMORROW'S DEDICATION CEREMONIES.
PUBLICITY-WISE, WE CAN'T AFFORD ANY SURPRISES--NOT LIKE THE ONE THAT FLEW THROUGH OUR WINDOW THIS MORNING.
IN TRUTH, I AM SORELY CONFUSED BY THE POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE ATTENDING THE FOUNDING OF THE CHAMPIONS.
DO WE TRULY REQUIRE ALL THIS?
THESE ARE HIGH-POWERED TIMES HERCULES. A HIGH-SPEED ORGANIZATION WITH PLENTY OF MANPOWER IS NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH THE KIND OF JOB WE WANT TO DO!
PERHAPS, FRIEND FENSTER.
BUT HERCULES DOTH LONG FOR SIMPLER TIMES.
YOU AND ME BOTH, HERCULES.
I'M AFRAID MY BUDDY WARREN HAS TAKEN THIS WHOLE PROJECT WAY TOO FAR.
ACTUALLY--
ACTUALLY, DICKEY-BOY, THERE'S A REAL DANGER THE CHAMPS COULD LOSE SIGHT--
--OF THE COMMON JOES WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE HELPING. THINK ABOUT IT.
I HAVE--AND IT'S JUST ONE MORE REASON--THAT ONCE WARREN GETS THE GROUP RUNNING SMOOTHLY--
--THE ICEMAN IS CALLING IT QUITS!
IF THEY REMAIN HERE MUCH LONGER, THEY ARE CERTAIN TO DISCOVER ME!
I CANNOT RISK THAT!
I'LL HAVE TO ARRANGE A DIVERSION EVEN IF IT MEANS...
LOOK!

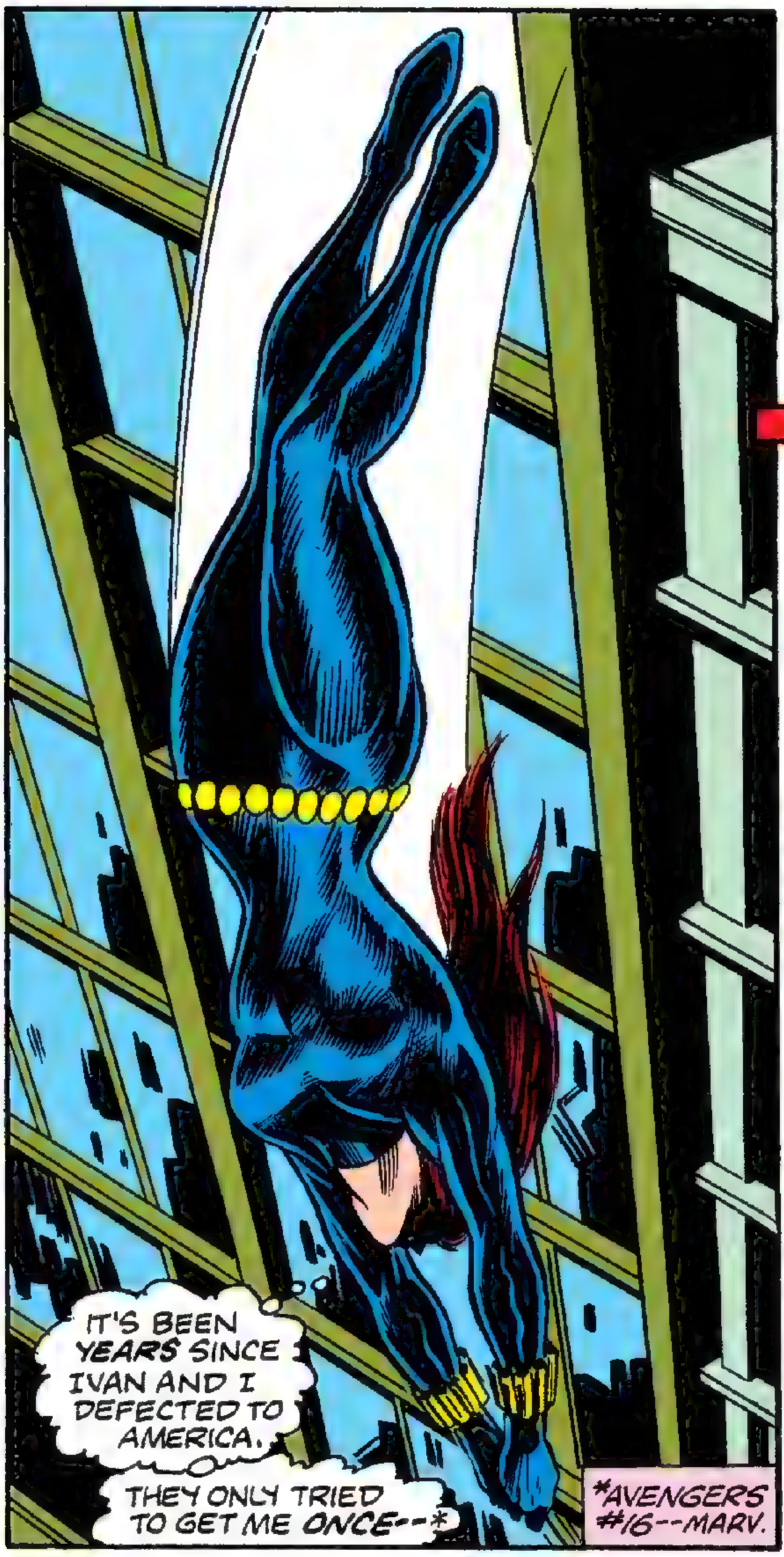

THERE'S SOMEBODY OVER THERE!
WHA--?
I CAN SEE YON INTRUDER'S FORM--
--BUT THE DARKNESS DOTH CLOAK HIS IDENTITY!
HE'S ESCAPING INTO THE CORRIDOR!
IF HE REACHES THE STAIRWELL, WE'LL NEVER CATCH HIM!
ONLY THIS WALL STANDS BETWIXT US AND THE BASEBORN VILLAIN WE PURSUE --AND BY THE STRENGTH WHICH IS MINE--
--IT SHALL STAND NO MORE!
KRUNCH
OH, NO!
IT'LL COST A SMALL FORTUNE TO GET THAT WALL REPAIRED BY TOMORROW!
BEFORE OUR SLIGHTLY OVER-EAGER OLYMPIAN RIPS THE WHOLE BUILDING APART--
--I THINK I'D BETTER STOP OUR FLEEING FRIEND MYSELF!
YEOWW!
FRIZZZ
I HAVE HIM, ICEMAN. I--
BY MY SOUL!

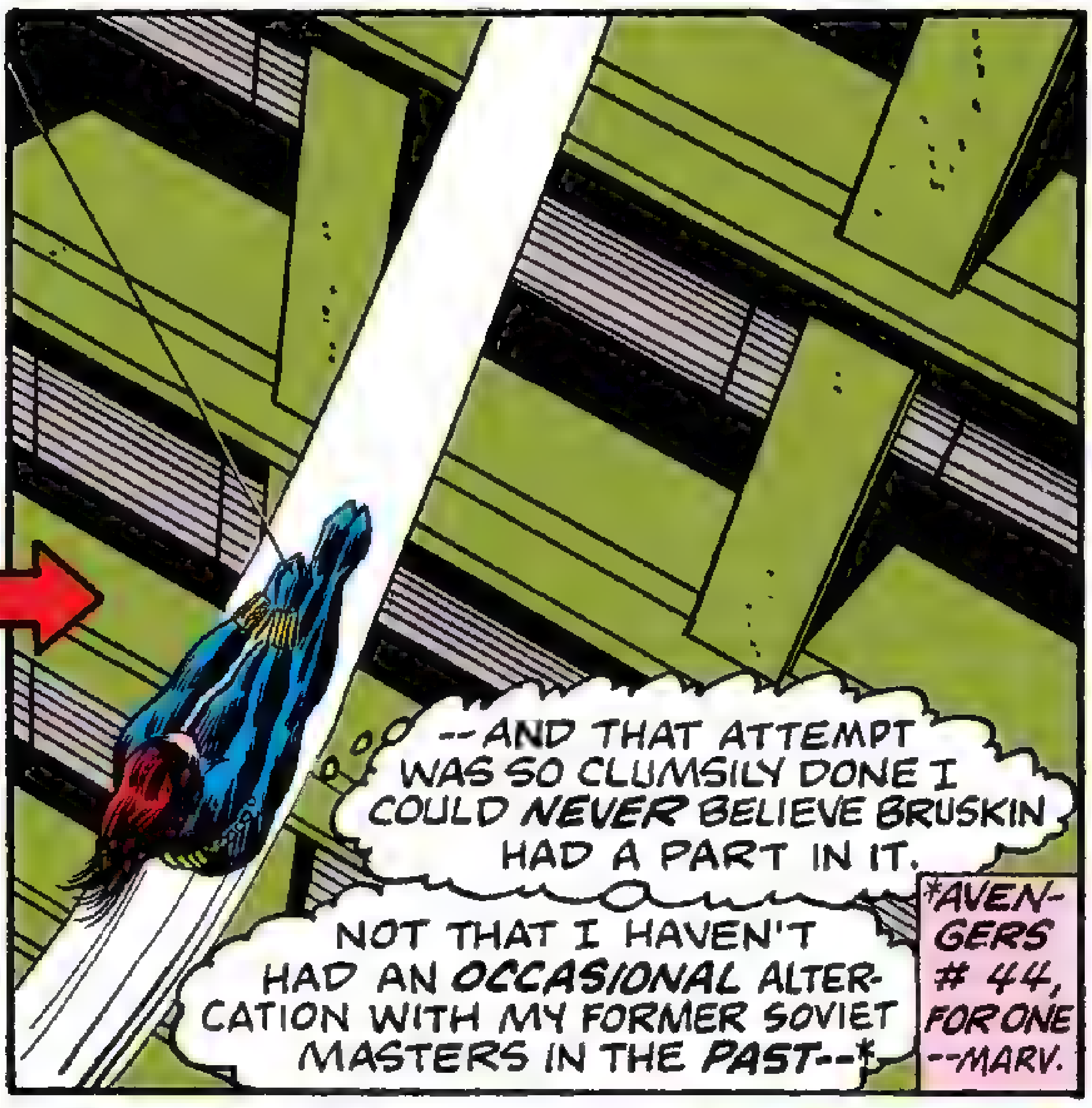

THOU ART BUT A CHILD!
I'M *SOB* SORRY I SNEAKED IN HERE, MISTER.
BUT I *SOB* HAD TO!
Y'SEE, I *SOB* HEARD ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ON *SOB* THE TELEVISION!
THE MAN SAID THAT IF PEOPLE WHO ARE IN *SOB* TROUBLE COME TO YOU-- --THAT YOU'RE S'PPOSE TO *SOB* HELP THEM.
AND, MISTER--
--I NEED HELP AWFUL BAD!
WHAT INCREDIBLE GOOD FORTUNE!
THE CHILD DISTRACTED THEM LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO REACH THE OPPOSITE STAIRWELL. MOREOVER--
-- MY SCOUTING MISSION WAS A SUCCESS.
I'VE LEARNED ENOUGH ABOUT OUR FOES TO INSURE US OF COMPLETE VICTORY.
SOON I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE--
--REVENGE ON THE MAN WHO MADE ME THE OUTCAST I AM--
-- THE MAN THE CHAMPIONS KNOW ONLY AS IVAN-- BUT WHO I KNOW AS--
--MY DEAR FATHER!

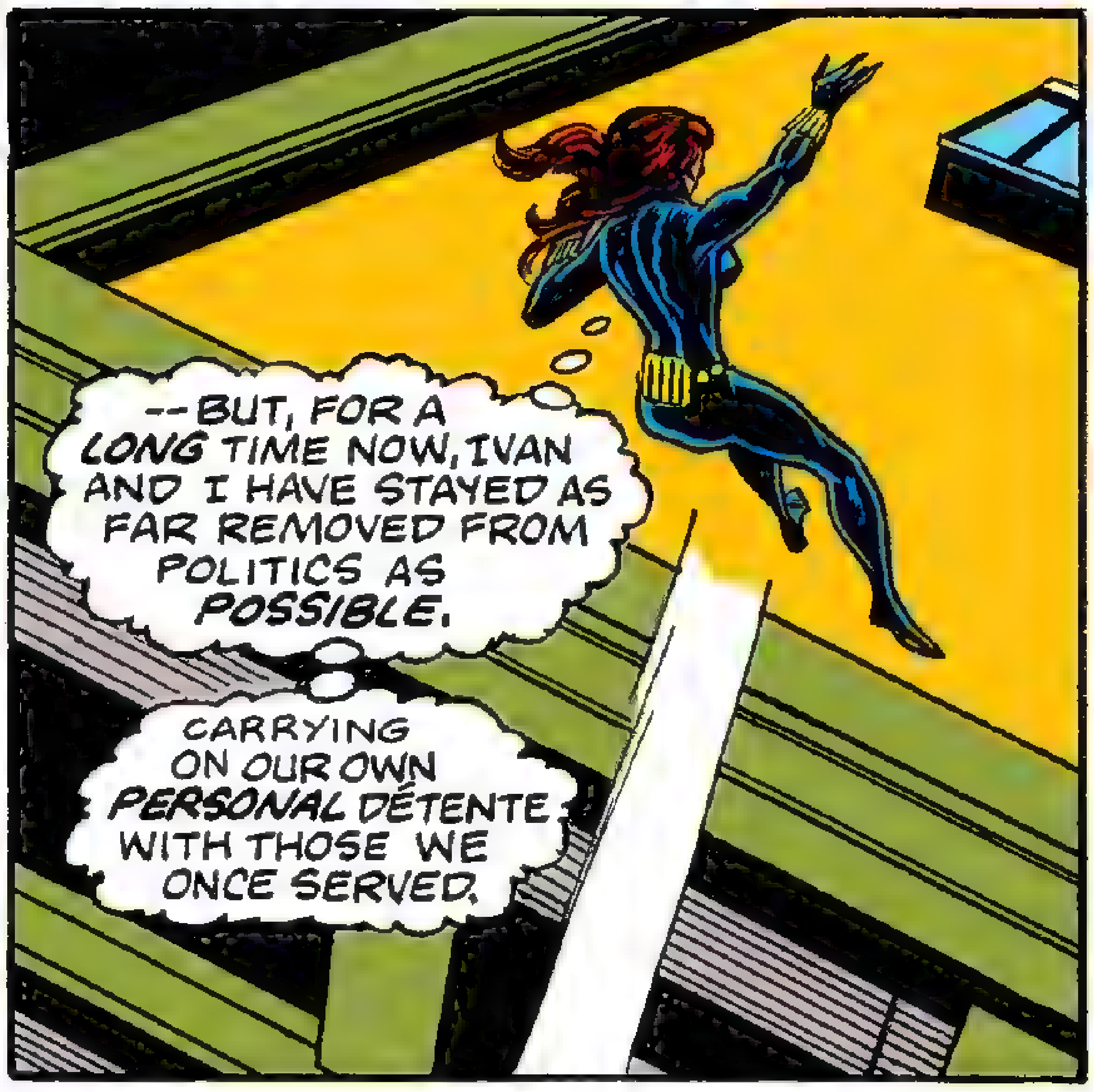

MEANWHILE IN A JURY-RIGGED LAB IN THE CHAMPION'S TEMORARY HQ...
OUR UNINVITED FLYING OBJECT BREAKS DOWN INTO THREE MAJOR COMPONENTS, 'TASHA--
--A HIDDEN AUDIO-VISUAL UNIT IN THE FRONT FOR COMMUNICATION AND GUIDANCE--
--A STORAGE UNIT IN THE CENTER--
--AND A PROPULSION UNIT AT THE END.
NOW THE BIG QUESTION, OLD FRIEND.
WHO SENT IT?
THE STORAGE UNIT WAS THE GIVEAWAY, KID.
LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE IT.
A BLACK PEARL!
IVAN THERE'S ONLY ONE MAN IN ALL THE WORLD WHO WOULD SEND THIS!
IT'S HIS KIND OF CALLING CARD ALRIGHT.
YOU'RE SLIPPING COMRADES. ONCE YOU WOULD HAVE INSTANTLY REALIZED MY IDENTITY.
HAVE THE YEARS WEIGHED SO HEAVILY AGAINST US?
THAT VOICE! IT IS HIM!
NATURALLY, MY LITTLE TSARINA, AND SHOULD YOU DESIRE FURTHER VERIFICATION, YOU HAVE BUT TO JOIN ME.
I SHALL BE WAITING.
I CAN SEE HIM, IVAN.
HE'S ON THE ROOF ACROSS THE STREET.

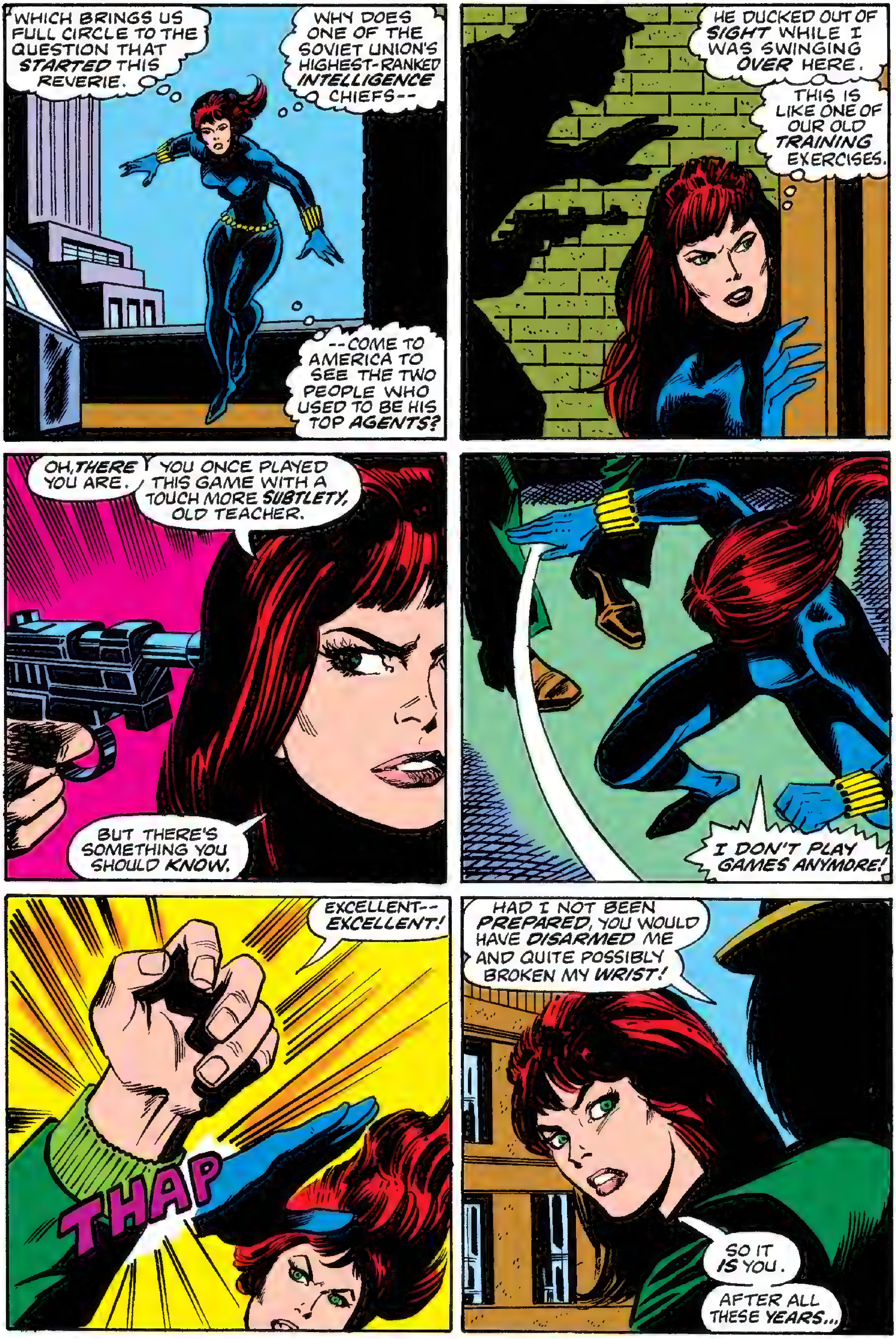

THERE'S ONLY *ONE* WAY TO LEARN WHAT HE *WANTS*.
NATASHA-- *WAIT!*
IT MIGHT BE A *TRAP!*

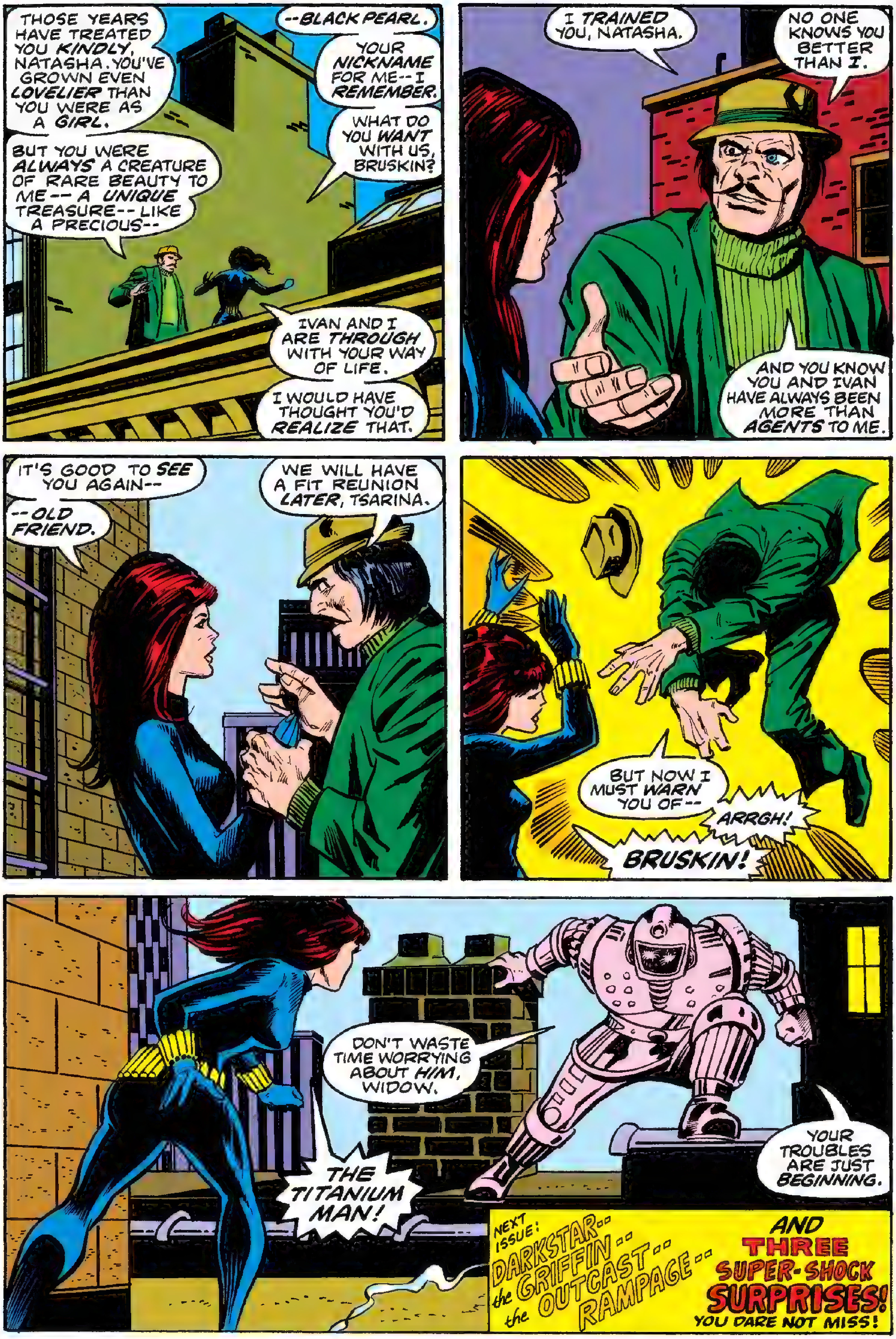

TRAP? YES, IT *COULD* BE.
BUT WHY WOULD COMMISSAR BRUSKIN COME AFTER US *NOW?*


IT'S BEEN *YEARS* SINCE IVAN AND I DEFECTED TO AMERICA.
THEY ONLY TRIED TO GET ME *ONCE*--*
*AVENGERS #16--MARV.


--AND THAT ATTEMPT WAS SO CLUMSILY DONE I COULD *NEVER* BELIEVE BRUSKIN HAD A PART IN IT.
NOT THAT I HAVEN'T HAD AN *OCCASIONAL* ALTERCATION WITH MY FORMER SOVIET MASTERS IN THE *PAST*--*
*AVENGERS # 44, FOR ONE --MARV.


--BUT, FOR A *LONG* TIME NOW, IVAN AND I HAVE STAYED AS FAR REMOVED FROM POLITICS AS *POSSIBLE*.
CARRYING ON OUR OWN *PERSONAL* DÉTENTE WITH THOSE WE ONCE SERVED.


WHICH BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE TO THE QUESTION THAT *STARTED* THIS REVERIE.
WHY DOES ONE OF THE SOVIET UNION'S HIGHEST-RANKED *INTELLIGENCE* CHIEFS--
--COME TO AMERICA TO SEE THE TWO PEOPLE WHO USED TO BE HIS TOP *AGENTS?*
HE DUCKED OUT OF *SIGHT* WHILE I WAS SWINGING *OVER* HERE.
THIS IS LIKE ONE OF OUR OLD *TRAINING* EXERCISES.
OH, *THERE* YOU ARE.
YOU ONCE PLAYED THIS GAME WITH A TOUCH MORE *SUBTLETY,* OLD TEACHER.
BUT THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD *KNOW.*
I DON'T PLAY GAMES ANYMORE!
EXCELLENT-- *EXCELLENT!*
THAP
HAD I NOT BEEN *PREPARED,* YOU WOULD HAVE *DISARMED* ME AND QUITE POSSIBLY BROKEN MY *WRIST!*
SO IT *IS* YOU.
AFTER ALL THESE *YEARS...*


THOSE YEARS HAVE TREATED YOU KINDLY, NATASHA. YOU'VE GROWN EVEN LOVELIER THAN YOU WERE AS A GIRL.
BUT YOU WERE ALWAYS A CREATURE OF RARE BEAUTY TO ME -- A UNIQUE TREASURE -- LIKE A PRECIOUS--
--BLACK PEARL.
YOUR NICKNAME FOR ME -- I REMEMBER.
WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH US, BRUSKIN?
IVAN AND I ARE THROUGH WITH YOUR WAY OF LIFE.
I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D REALIZE THAT.
I TRAINED YOU, NATASHA.
NO ONE KNOWS YOU BETTER THAN I.
AND YOU KNOW YOU AND IVAN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MORE THAN AGENTS TO ME.
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN--
--OLD FRIEND.
WE WILL HAVE A FIT REUNION LATER, TSARINA.
BUT NOW I MUST WARN YOU OF --
ARRGH!
BRUSKIN!
DON'T WASTE TIME WORRYING ABOUT HIM, WIDOW.
THE TITANIUM MAN!
YOUR TROUBLES ARE JUST BEGINNING.
NEXT ISSUE: DARKSTAR -- the GRIFFIN -- the OUTCAST -- RAMPAGE -- AND THREE SUPER-SHOCK SURPRISES! YOU DARE NOT MISS!

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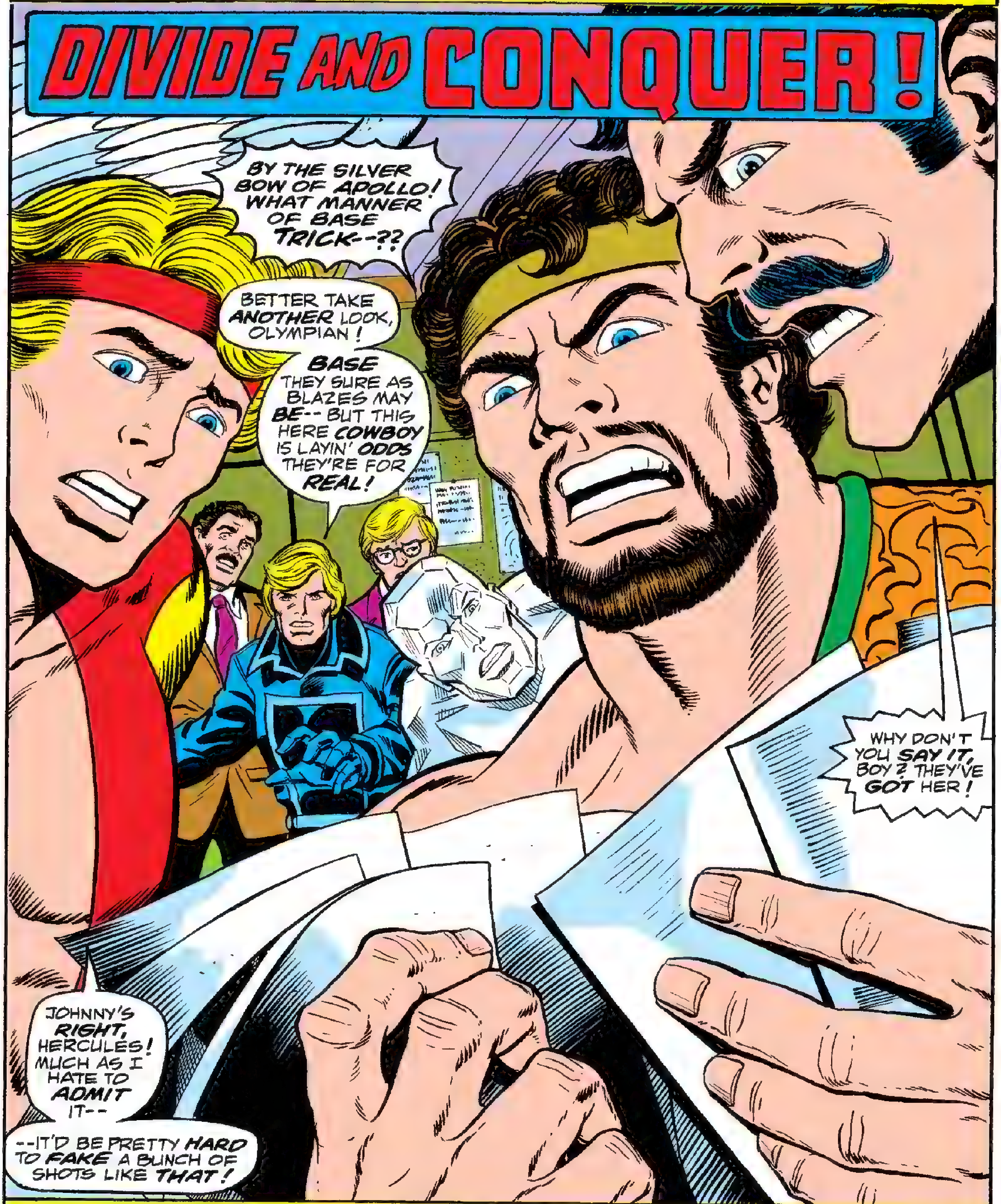
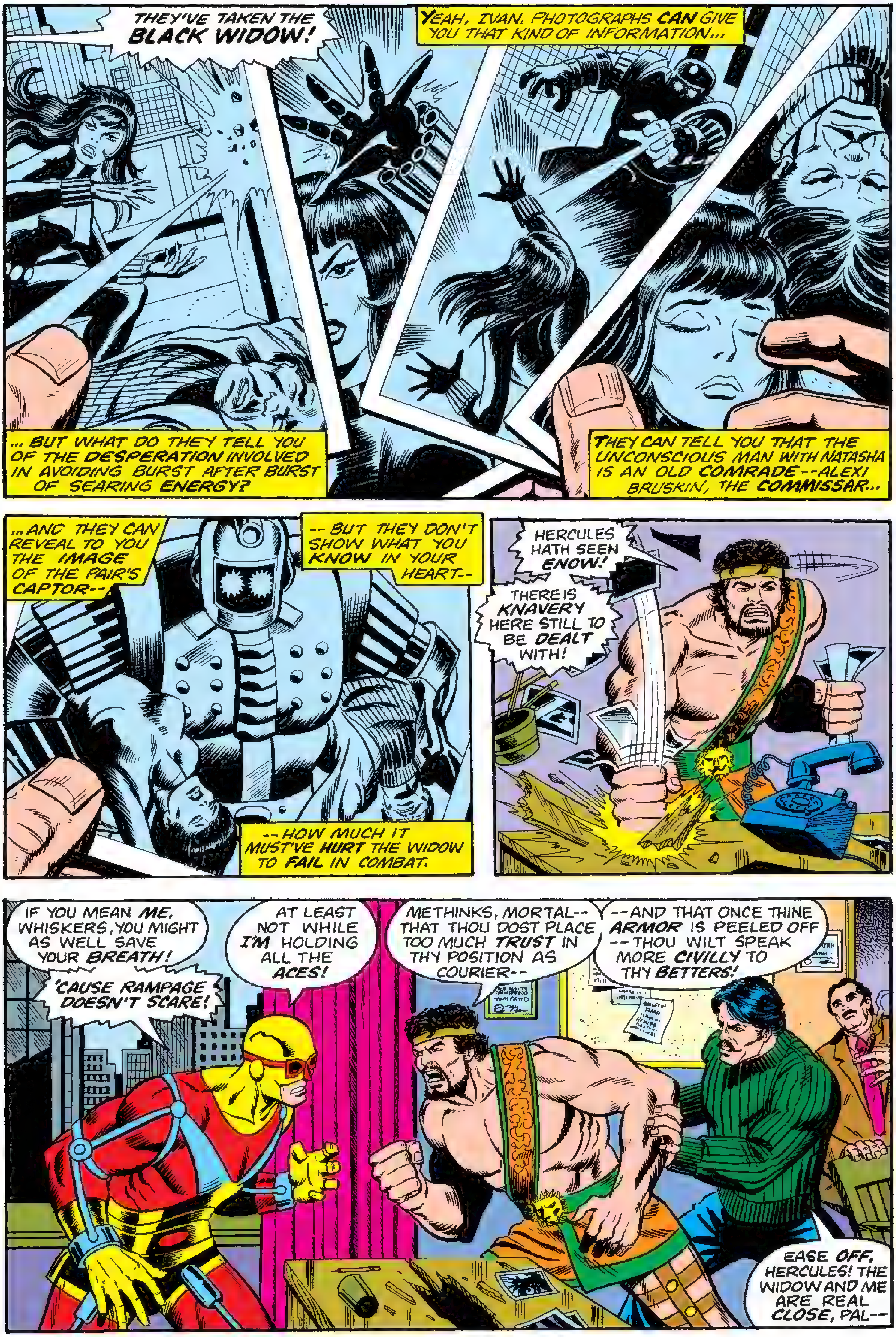
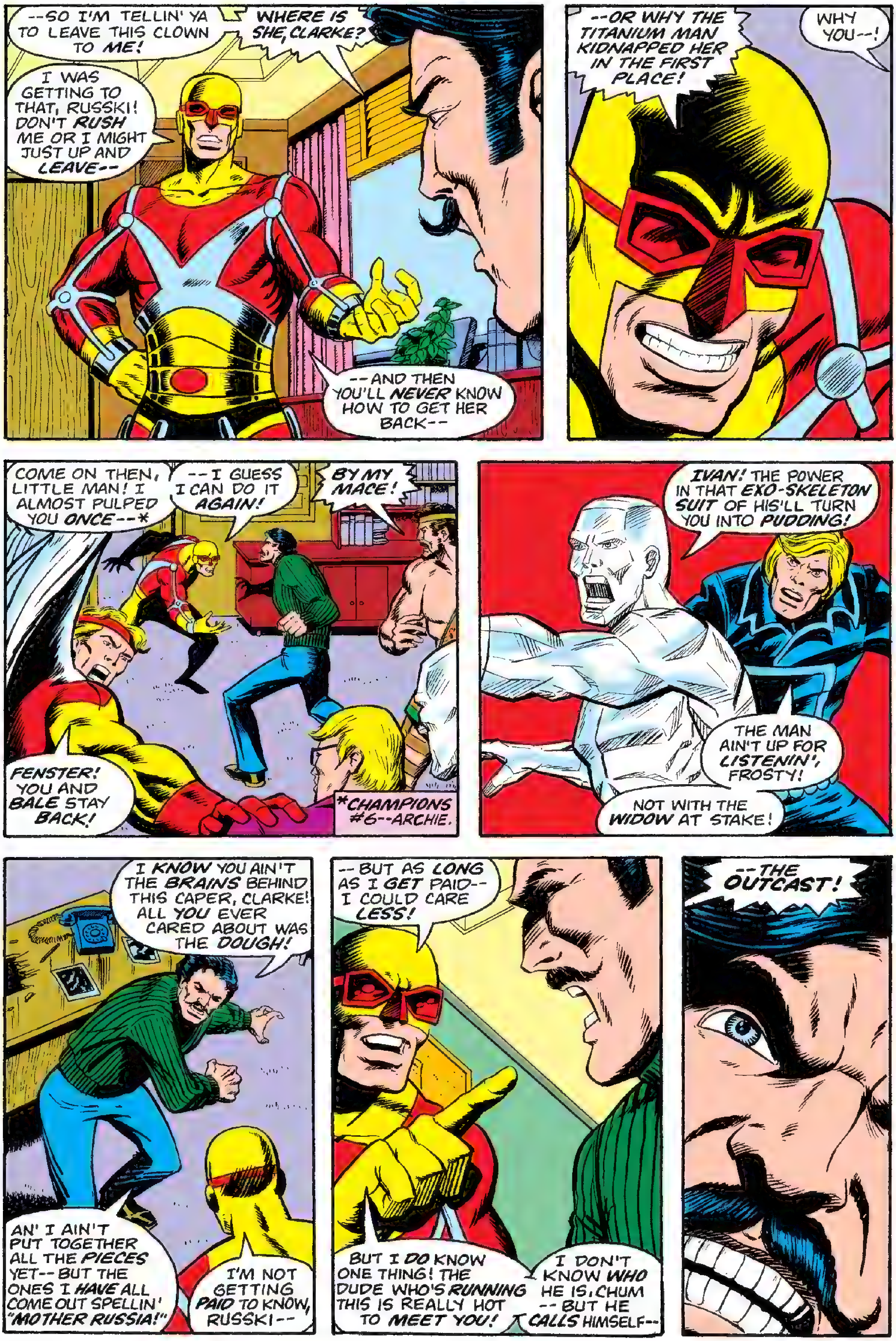
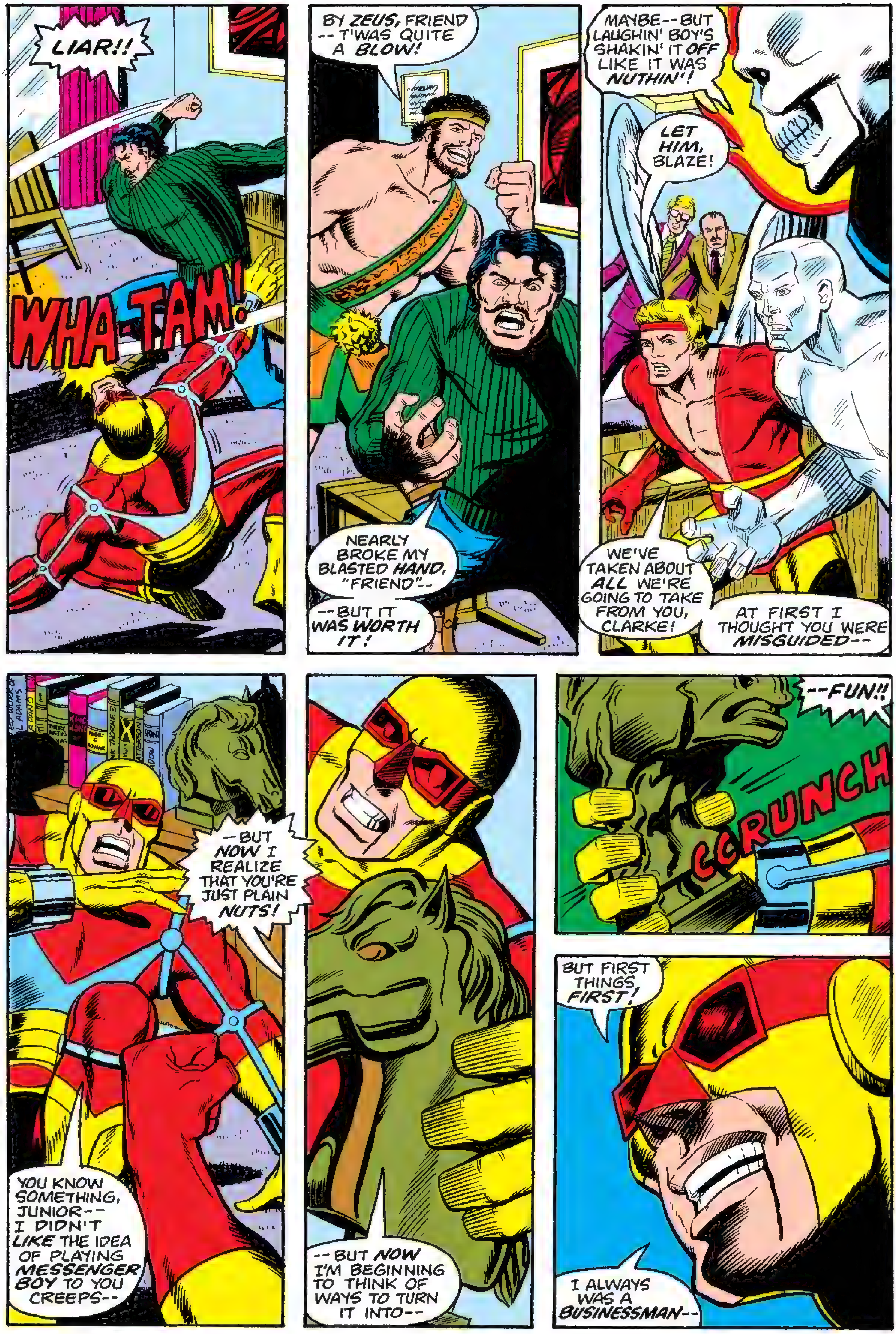
DIVIDE AND CONQUER!

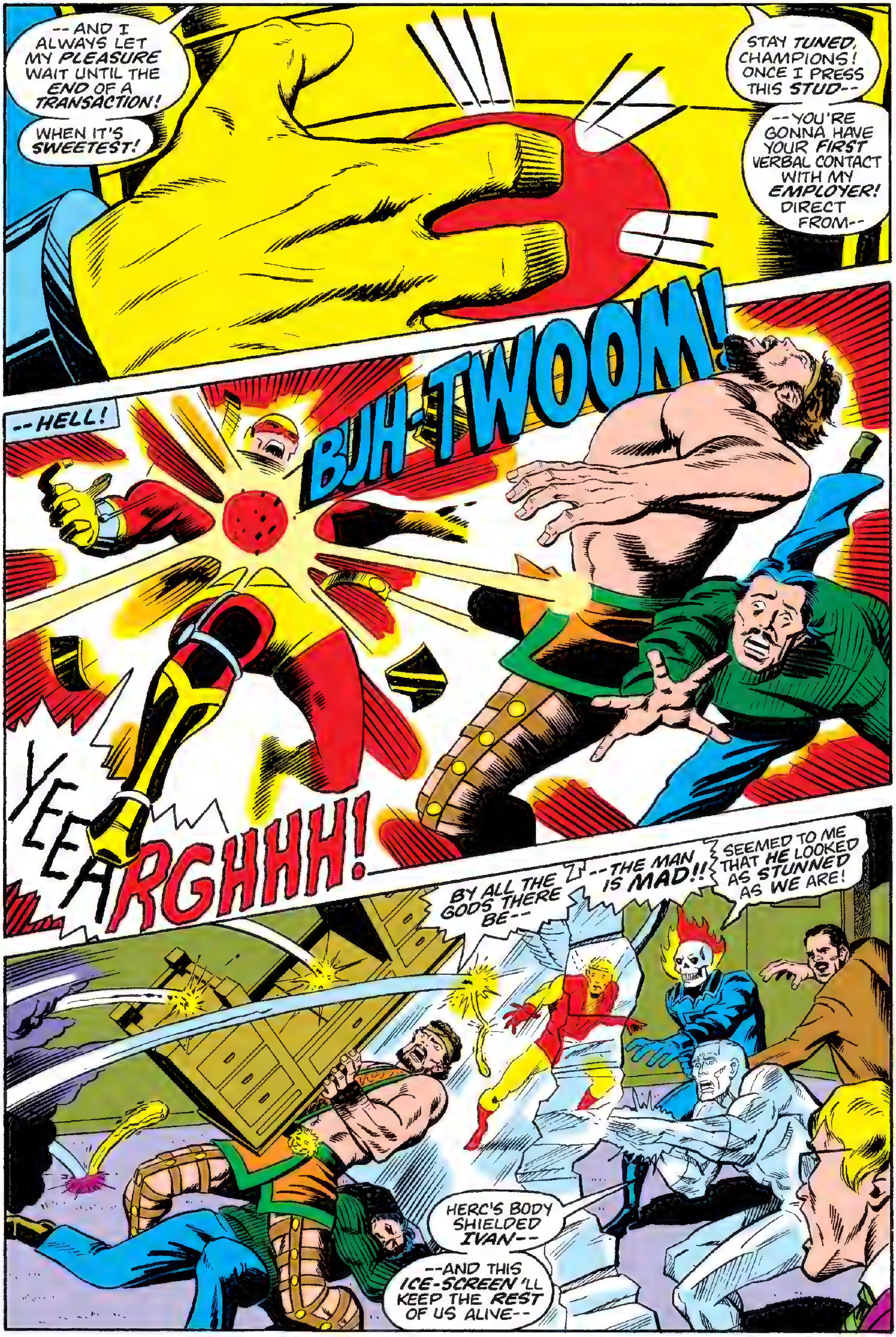

BY THE SILVER BOW OF APOLLO! WHAT MANNER OF BASE TRICK--??
BETTER TAKE ANOTHER LOOK, OLYMPIAN!
BASE THEY SURE AS BLAZES MAY BE-- BUT THIS HERE COWBOY IS LAYIN' ODDS THEY'RE FOR REAL!
WHY DON'T YOU SAY IT, BOY? THEY'VE GOT HER!
JOHNNY'S RIGHT, HERCULES! MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT--
--IT'D BE PRETTY HARD TO FAKE A BUNCH OF SHOTS LIKE THAT!

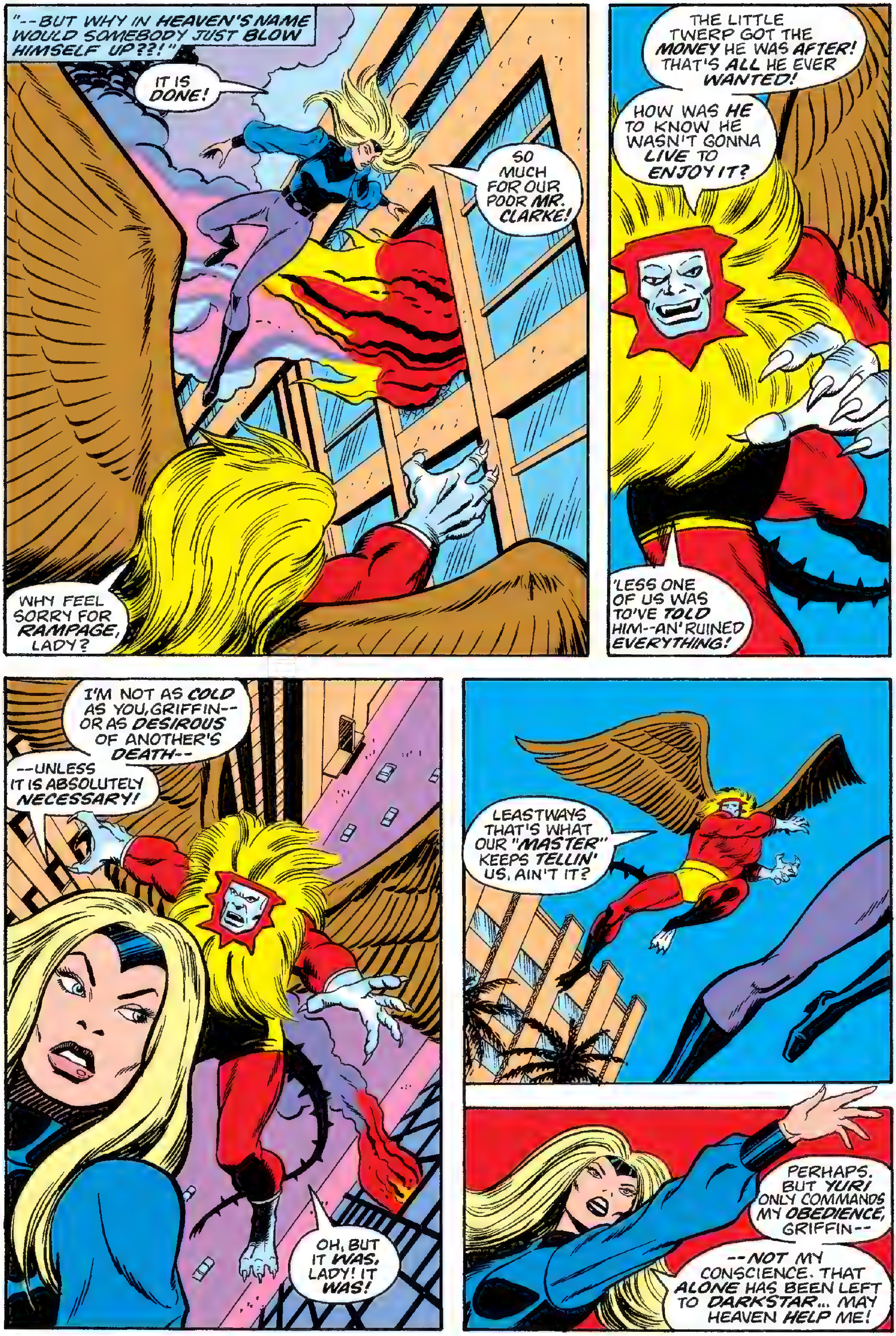
BILL MANTLO WRITER / BOB HALL PENCILLER / B. PATTERSON INKER / K. MANTLO LETTERER / D. WARFIELD COLORIST / ARCHIE GOODWIN EDITOR

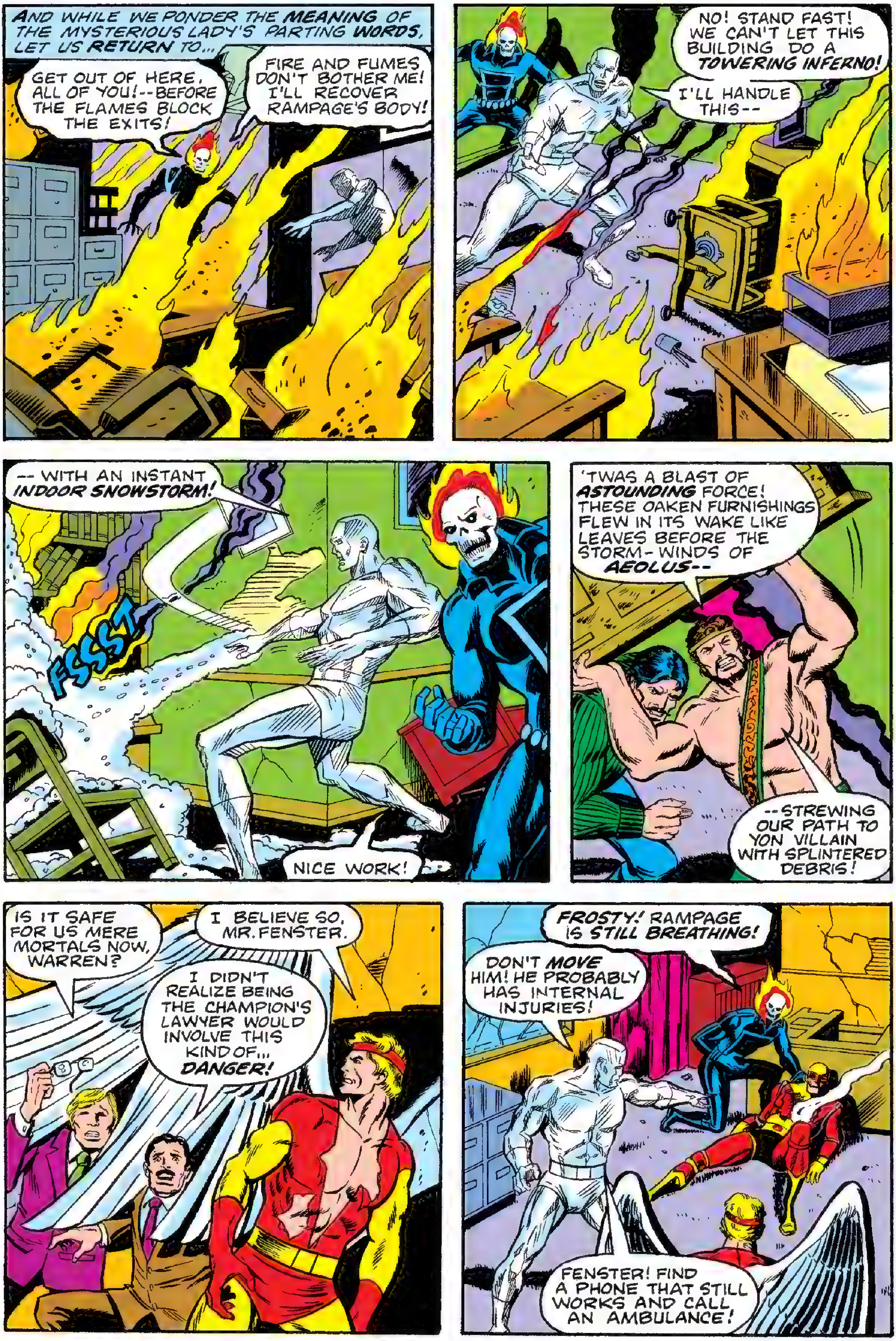

THEY'VE TAKEN THE **BLACK WIDOW!**
YEAH, IVAN. PHOTOGRAPHS **CAN** GIVE YOU THAT KIND OF INFORMATION...
...BUT WHAT DO THEY TELL YOU OF THE **DESPERATION** INVOLVED IN AVOIDING BURST AFTER BURST OF SEARING **ENERGY?**
THEY CAN TELL YOU THAT THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN WITH NATASHA IS AN OLD **COMRADE**--ALEXI BRUSKIN, THE **COMMISSAR**...
...AND THEY CAN REVEAL TO YOU THE **IMAGE** OF THE PAIR'S **CAPTOR**--
--BUT THEY DON'T SHOW WHAT YOU **KNOW** IN YOUR HEART--
--HOW MUCH IT MUST'VE **HURT** THE WIDOW TO **FAIL** IN COMBAT.
HERCULES HATH SEEN **ENOW!**
THERE IS **KNAVERY** HERE STILL TO BE **DEALT** WITH!
IF YOU MEAN **ME**, WHISKERS, YOU MIGHT AS WELL SAVE YOUR **BREATH!**
'CAUSE RAMPAGE DOESN'T SCARE!
AT LEAST NOT WHILE **I'M** HOLDING ALL THE **ACES!**
METHINKS, MORTAL-- THAT THOU DOST PLACE TOO MUCH **TRUST** IN THY POSITION AS COURIER--
--AND THAT ONCE THINE **ARMOR** IS PEELED OFF --THOU WILT SPEAK MORE **CIVILLY** TO THY **BETTERS!**
EASE **OFF**, HERCULES! THE WIDOW AND ME ARE REAL **CLOSE**, PAL--

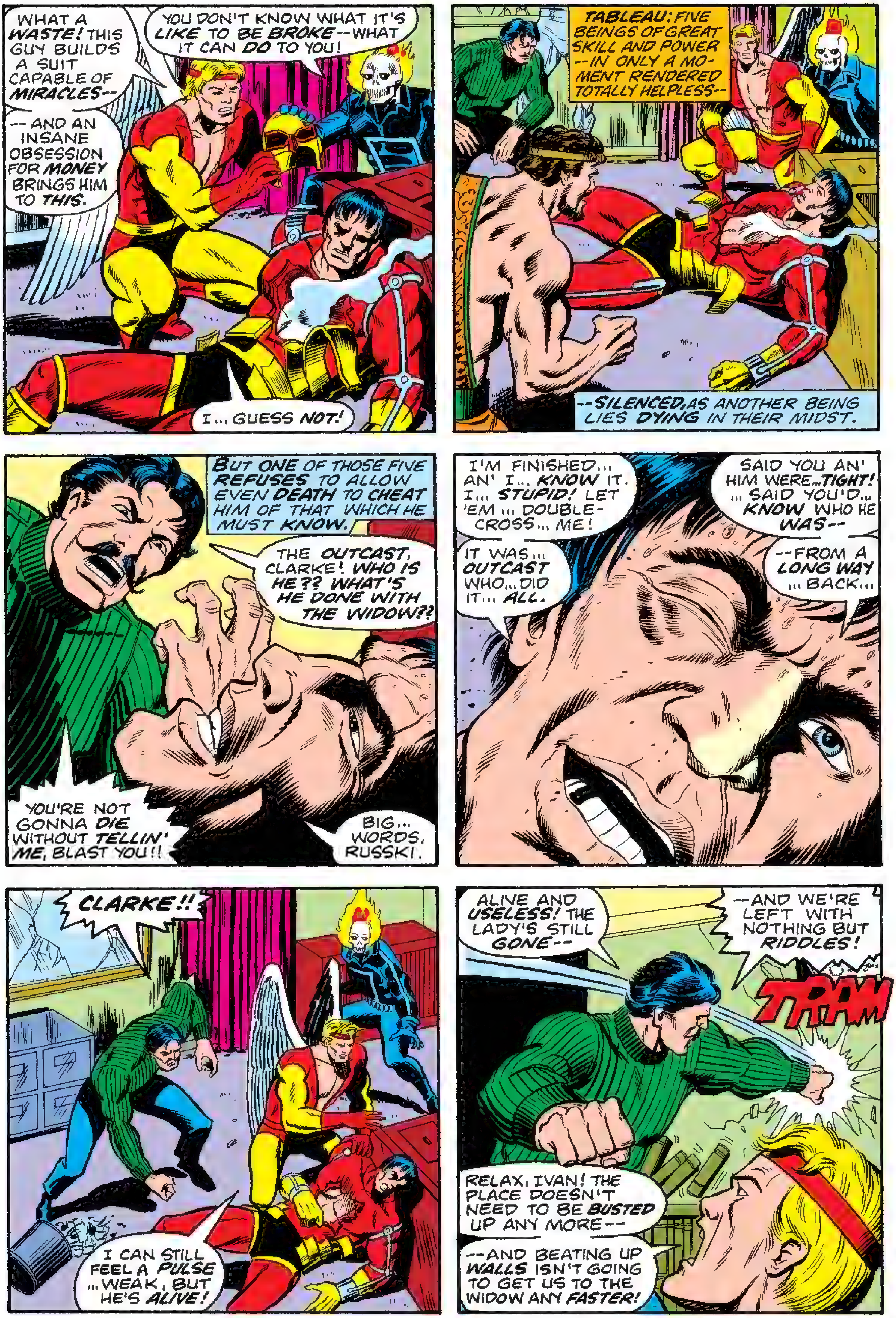

--SO I'M TELLIN' YA TO LEAVE THIS CLOWN TO ME!
WHERE IS SHE, CLARKE?
I WAS GETTING TO THAT, RUSSKI! DON'T RUSH ME OR I MIGHT JUST UP AND LEAVE--
--AND THEN YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW TO GET HER BACK--
--OR WHY THE TITANIUM MAN KIDNAPPED HER IN THE FIRST PLACE!
WHY YOU--!
COME ON THEN, LITTLE MAN! I ALMOST PULPED YOU ONCE--*
--I GUESS I CAN DO IT AGAIN!
BY MY MACE!
FENSTER! YOU AND BALE STAY BACK!
*CHAMPIONS #6--ARCHIE.
IVAN! THE POWER IN THAT EXO-SKELETON SUIT OF HIS'LL TURN YOU INTO PUDDING!
THE MAN AIN'T UP FOR LISTENIN', FROSTY!
NOT WITH THE WIDOW AT STAKE!
I KNOW YOU AIN'T THE BRAINS BEHIND THIS CAPER, CLARKE! ALL YOU EVER CARED ABOUT WAS THE DOUGH!
AN' I AIN'T PUT TOGETHER ALL THE PIECES YET-- BUT THE ONES I HAVE ALL COME OUT SPELLIN' "MOTHER RUSSIA!"
I'M NOT GETTING PAID TO KNOW, RUSSKI--
--BUT AS LONG AS I GET PAID-- I COULD CARE LESS!
BUT I DO KNOW ONE THING! THE DUDE WHO'S RUNNING THIS IS REALLY HOT TO MEET YOU!
I DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS, CHUM --BUT HE CALLS HIMSELF--
--THE OUTCAST!]

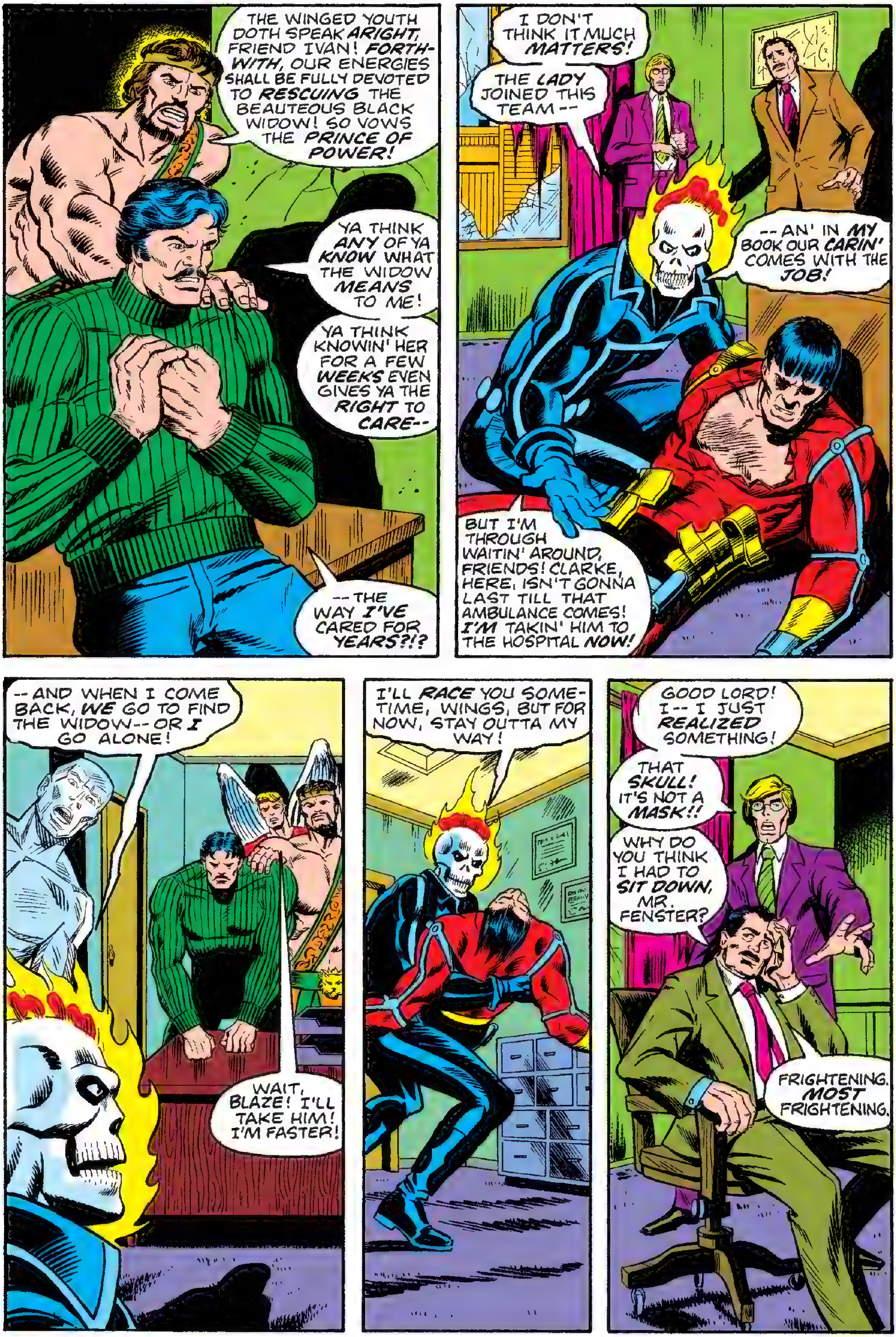

LIAR!!
WHA-TAM!
BY ZEUS, FRIEND -- T'WAS QUITE A *BLOW!*
NEARLY BROKE MY BLASTED *HAND,* "FRIEND"--
--BUT IT WAS *WORTH IT!*
MAYBE--BUT LAUGHIN' BOY'S SHAKIN' IT *OFF* LIKE IT WAS *NUTHIN'!*
LET HIM, BLAZE!
WE'VE TAKEN ABOUT *ALL* WE'RE GOING TO TAKE FROM YOU, CLARKE!
AT FIRST I THOUGHT YOU WERE *MISGUIDED*--
--BUT *NOW* I REALIZE THAT YOU'RE JUST PLAIN *NUTS!*
YOU KNOW SOMETHING, JUNIOR-- I DIDN'T *LIKE* THE IDEA OF PLAYING *MESSENGER BOY* TO YOU CREEPS--
--BUT *NOW* I'M BEGINNING TO THINK OF WAYS TO TURN IT INTO--
--FUN!!
CCRUNCH
BUT FIRST THINGS *FIRST!*
I ALWAYS WAS A *BUSINESSMAN*--

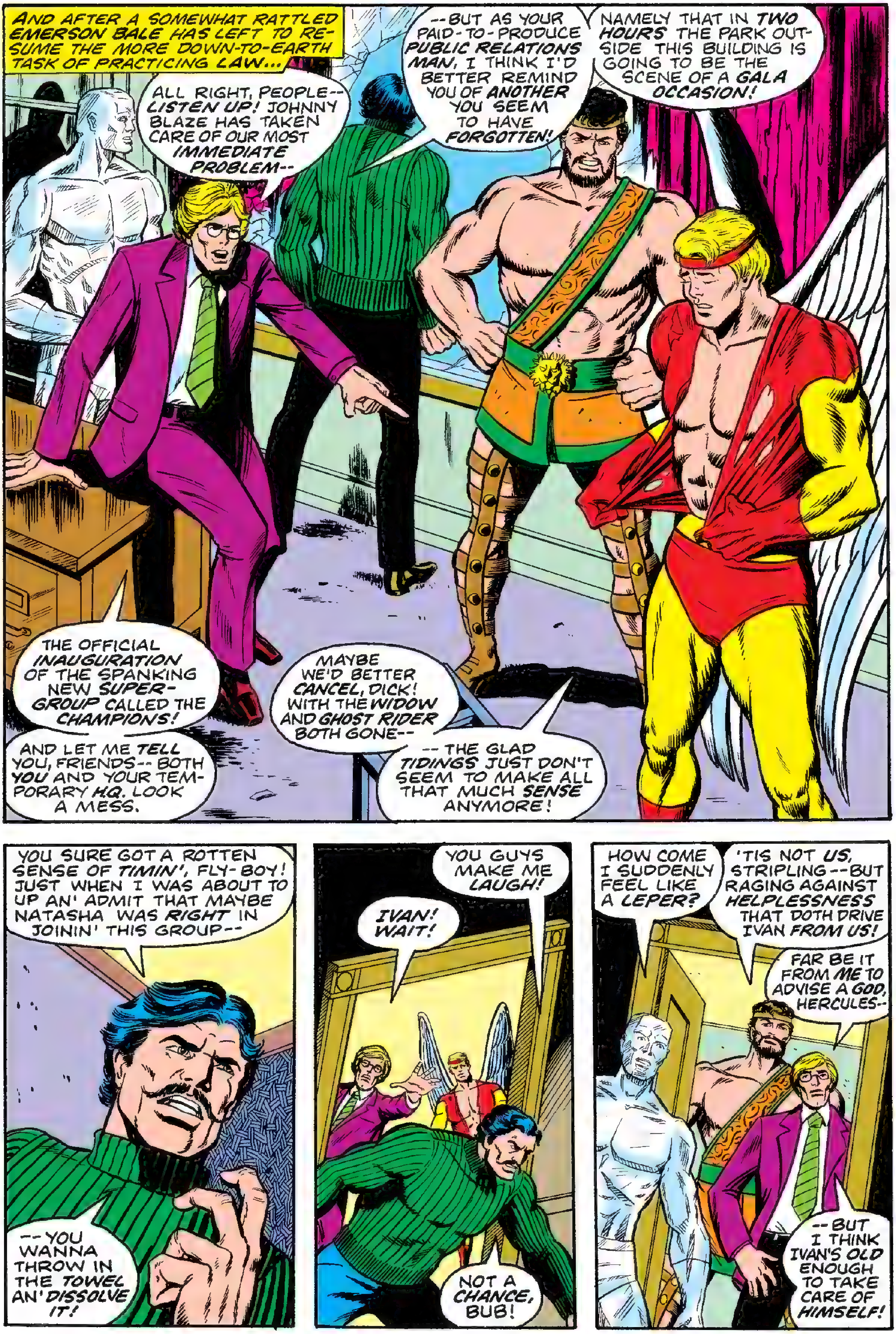

-- AND I ALWAYS LET MY PLEASURE WAIT UNTIL THE END OF A TRANSACTION!
WHEN IT'S SWEETEST!
STAY TUNED, CHAMPIONS! ONCE I PRESS THIS STUD--
-- YOU'RE GONNA HAVE YOUR FIRST VERBAL CONTACT WITH MY EMPLOYER! DIRECT FROM--
--HELL!
BUH-TWOOM!
YEEARGHHH!
BY ALL THE GODS THERE BE--
--THE MAN IS MAD!!
SEEMED TO ME THAT HE LOOKED AS STUNNED AS WE ARE!
HERC'S BODY SHIELDED IVAN--
--AND THIS ICE-SCREEN'LL KEEP THE REST OF US ALIVE--

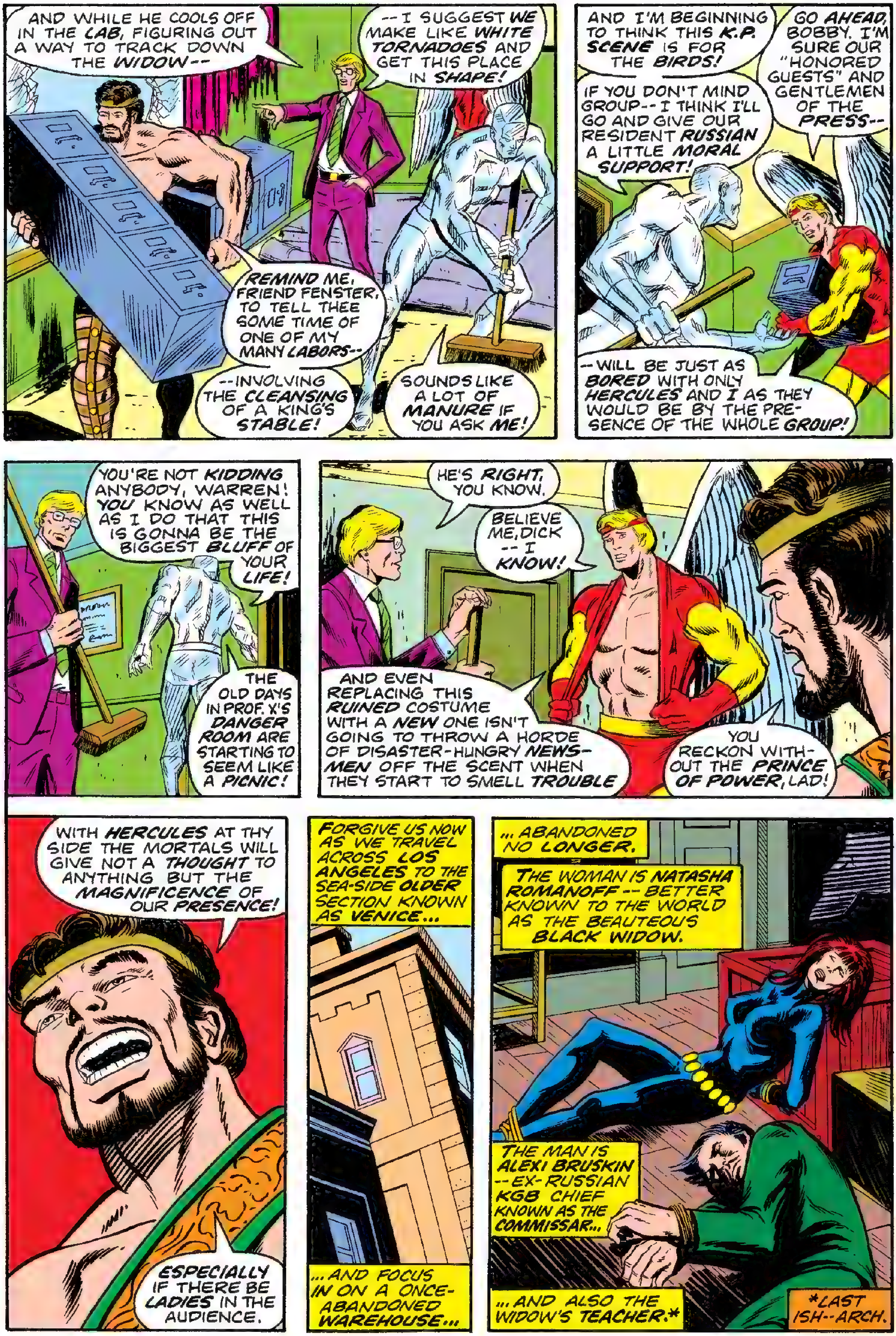

"--BUT WHY IN HEAVEN'S NAME WOULD SOMEBODY JUST BLOW HIMSELF UP??!"
IT IS DONE!
SO MUCH FOR OUR POOR MR. CLARKE!
WHY FEEL SORRY FOR RAMPAGE, LADY?
THE LITTLE TWERP GOT THE MONEY HE WAS AFTER! THAT'S ALL HE EVER WANTED!
HOW WAS HE TO KNOW HE WASN'T GONNA LIVE TO ENJOY IT?
'LESS ONE OF US WAS TO'VE TOLD HIM--AN' RUINED EVERYTHING!
I'M NOT AS COLD AS YOU, GRIFFIN-- OR AS DESIROUS OF ANOTHER'S DEATH--
--UNLESS IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY!
OH, BUT IT WAS, LADY! IT WAS!
LEASTWAYS THAT'S WHAT OUR "MASTER" KEEPS TELLIN' US, AIN'T IT?
PERHAPS. BUT YURI ONLY COMMANDS MY OBEDIENCE, GRIFFIN--
--NOT MY CONSCIENCE. THAT ALONE HAS BEEN LEFT TO DARKSTAR... MAY HEAVEN HELP ME!

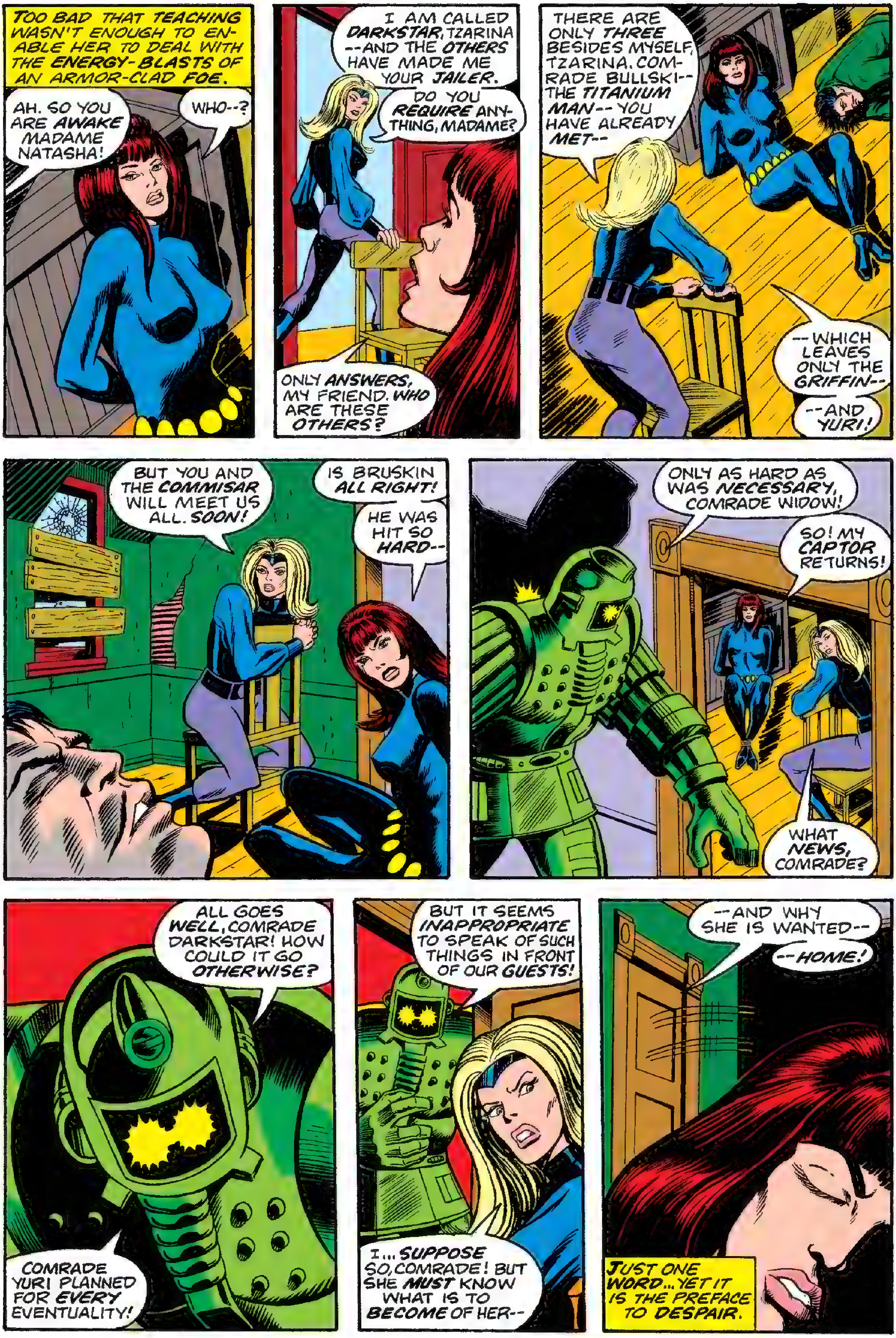

AND WHILE WE PONDER THE MEANING OF THE MYSTERIOUS LADY'S PARTING WORDS, LET US RETURN TO...
GET OUT OF HERE, ALL OF YOU!--BEFORE THE FLAMES BLOCK THE EXITS!
FIRE AND FUMES DON'T BOTHER ME! I'LL RECOVER RAMPAGE'S BODY!
NO! STAND FAST! WE CAN'T LET THIS BUILDING DO A TOWERING INFERNO!
I'LL HANDLE THIS--
-- WITH AN INSTANT INDOOR SNOWSTORM!
FSSST
NICE WORK!
'TWAS A BLAST OF ASTOUNDING FORCE! THESE OAKEN FURNISHINGS FLEW IN ITS WAKE LIKE LEAVES BEFORE THE STORM-WINDS OF AEOLUS--
--STREWING OUR PATH TO YON VILLAIN WITH SPLINTERED DEBRIS!
IS IT SAFE FOR US MERE MORTALS NOW, WARREN?
I BELIEVE SO, MR. FENSTER.
I DIDN'T REALIZE BEING THE CHAMPION'S LAWYER WOULD INVOLVE THIS KIND OF... DANGER!
FROSTY! RAMPAGE IS STILL BREATHING!
DON'T MOVE HIM! HE PROBABLY HAS INTERNAL INJURIES!
FENSTER! FIND A PHONE THAT STILL WORKS AND CALL AN AMBULANCE!

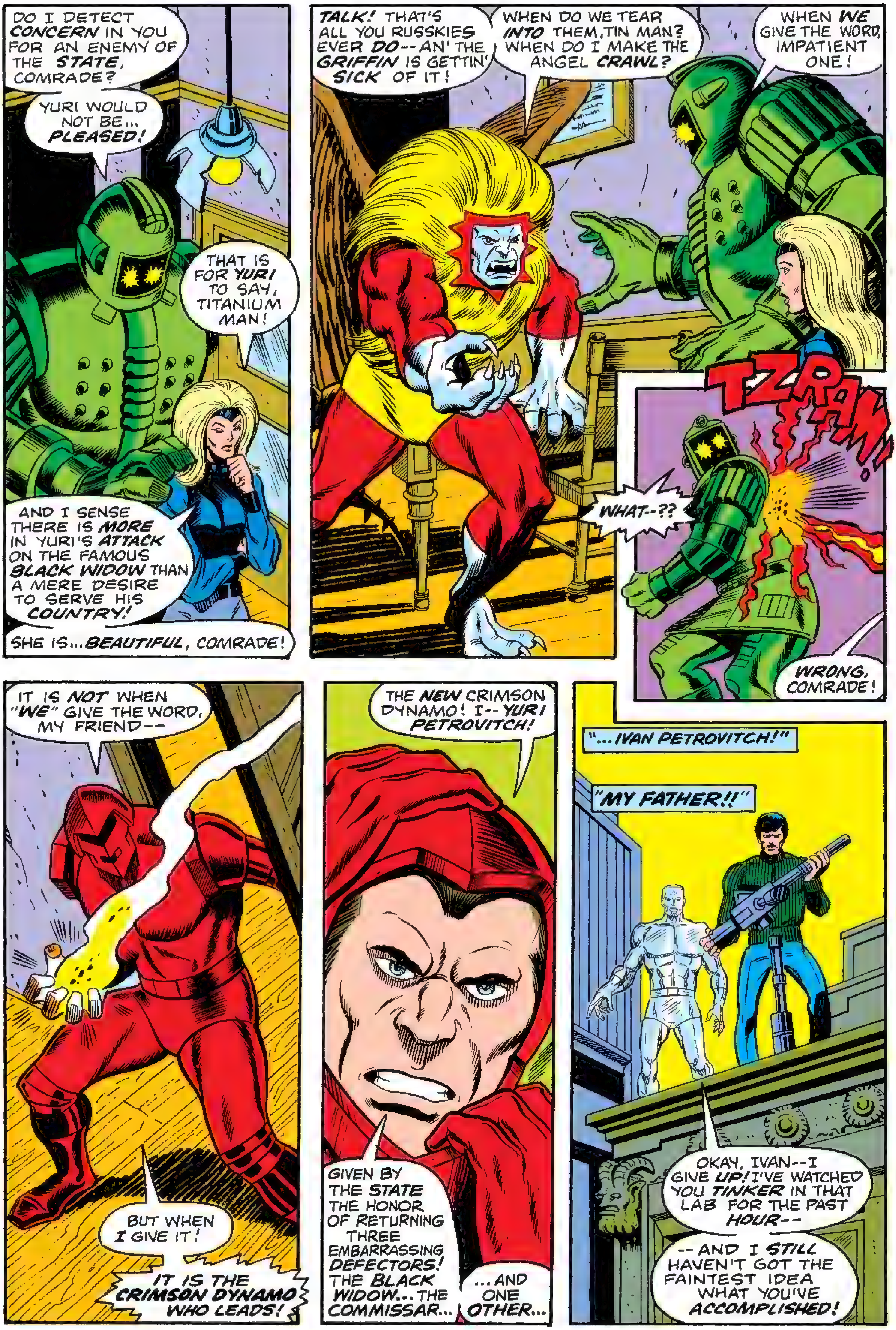

WHAT A WASTE! THIS GUY BUILDS A SUIT CAPABLE OF MIRACLES--
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE BROKE--WHAT IT CAN DO TO YOU!
--AND AN INSANE OBSESSION FOR MONEY BRINGS HIM TO THIS.
I... GUESS NOT!
TABLEAU: FIVE BEINGS OF GREAT SKILL AND POWER --IN ONLY A MOMENT RENDERED TOTALLY HELPLESS--
--SILENCED, AS ANOTHER BEING LIES DYING IN THEIR MIDST.
BUT ONE OF THOSE FIVE REFUSES TO ALLOW EVEN DEATH TO CHEAT HIM OF THAT WHICH HE MUST KNOW.
THE OUTCAST, CLARKE! WHO IS HE?? WHAT'S HE DONE WITH THE WIDOW??
YOU'RE NOT GONNA DIE WITHOUT TELLIN' ME, BLAST YOU!!
BIG... WORDS, RUSSKI.
I'M FINISHED... AN' I... KNOW IT. I... STUPID! LET 'EM ... DOUBLE-CROSS... ME!
IT WAS... OUTCAST WHO... DID IT... ALL.
SAID YOU AN' HIM WERE... TIGHT! ... SAID YOU'D... KNOW WHO HE WAS--
--FROM A LONG WAY ... BACK...
CLARKE!!
I CAN STILL FEEL A PULSE ...WEAK, BUT HE'S ALIVE!
ALIVE AND USELESS! THE LADY'S STILL GONE--
--AND WE'RE LEFT WITH NOTHING BUT RIDDLES!
TRAM
RELAX, IVAN! THE PLACE DOESN'T NEED TO BE BUSTED UP ANY MORE--
--AND BEATING UP WALLS ISN'T GOING TO GET US TO THE WIDOW ANY FASTER!

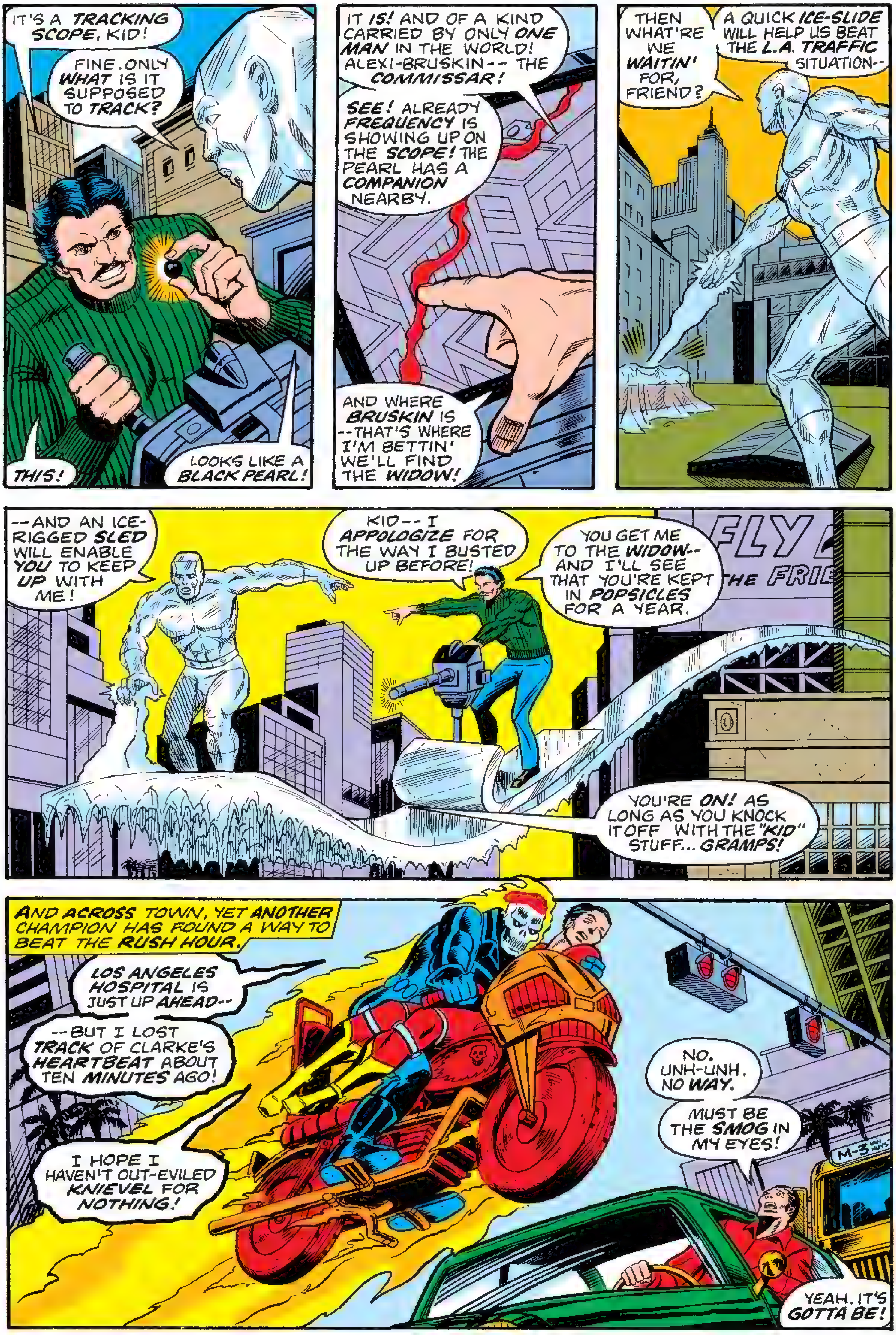

THE WINGED YOUTH DOTH SPEAK ARIGHT, FRIEND IVAN! FORTHWITH, OUR ENERGIES SHALL BE FULLY DEVOTED TO RESCUING THE BEAUTEOUS BLACK WIDOW! SO VOWS THE PRINCE OF POWER!
YA THINK ANY OF YA KNOW WHAT THE WIDOW MEANS TO ME!
YA THINK KNOWIN' HER FOR A FEW WEEKS EVEN GIVES YA THE RIGHT TO CARE--
--THE WAY I'VE CARED FOR YEARS?!?
I DON'T THINK IT MUCH MATTERS!
THE LADY JOINED THIS TEAM--
--AN' IN MY BOOK OUR CARIN' COMES WITH THE JOB!
BUT I'M THROUGH WAITIN' AROUND, FRIENDS! CLARKE, HERE, ISN'T GONNA LAST TILL THAT AMBULANCE COMES! I'M TAKIN' HIM TO THE HOSPITAL NOW!
--AND WHEN I COME BACK, WE GO TO FIND THE WIDOW--OR I GO ALONE!
WAIT, BLAZE! I'LL TAKE HIM! I'M FASTER!
I'LL RACE YOU SOMETIME, WINGS, BUT FOR NOW, STAY OUTTA MY WAY!
GOOD LORD! I-- I JUST REALIZED SOMETHING!
THAT SKULL! IT'S NOT A MASK!!
WHY DO YOU THINK I HAD TO SIT DOWN, MR. FENSTER?
FRIGHTENING. MOST FRIGHTENING.

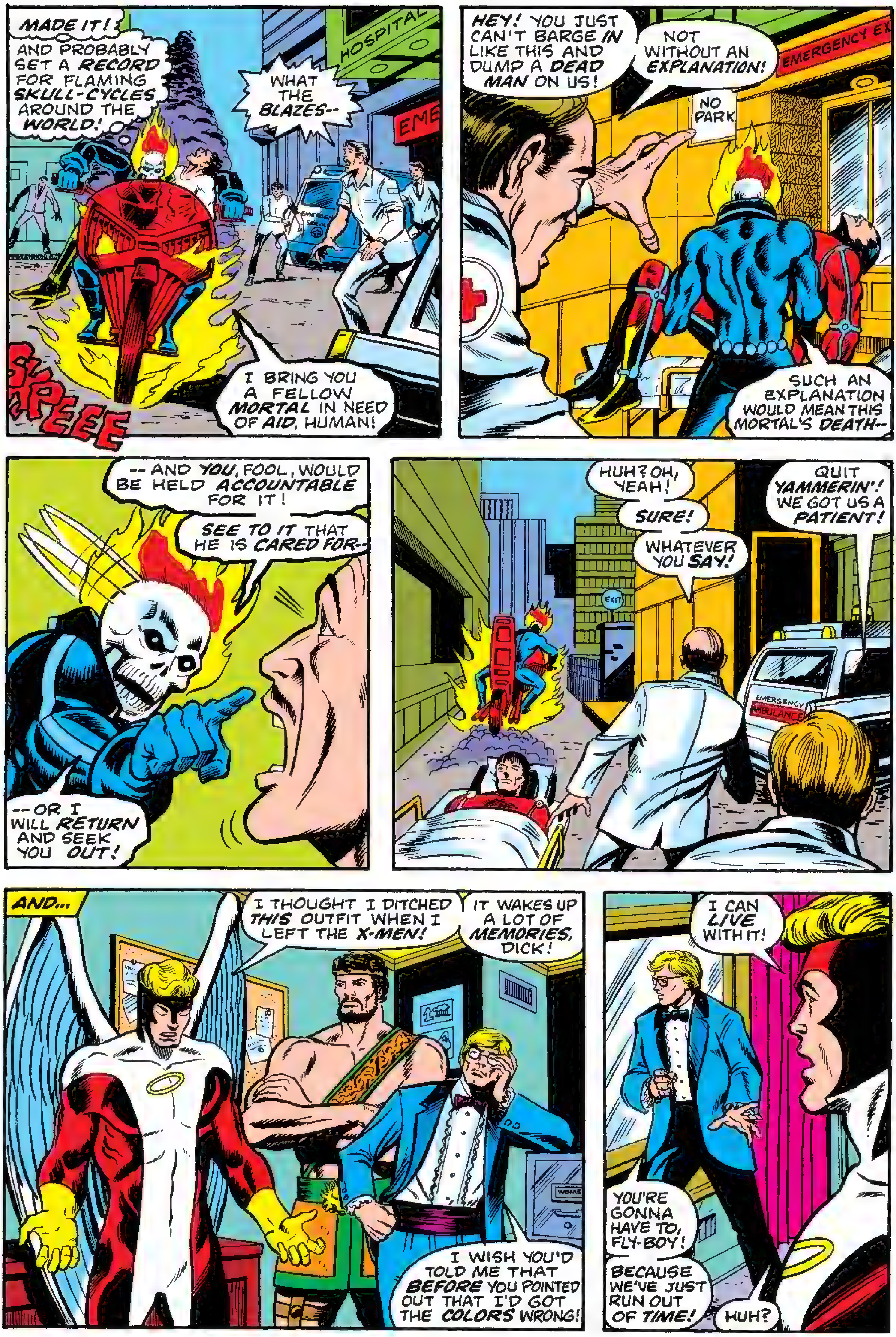

AND AFTER A SOMEWHAT RATTLED EMERSON BALE HAS LEFT TO RESUME THE MORE DOWN-TO-EARTH TASK OF PRACTICING LAW...
ALL RIGHT, PEOPLE-- LISTEN UP! JOHNNY BLAZE HAS TAKEN CARE OF OUR MOST IMMEDIATE PROBLEM--
--BUT AS YOUR PAID-TO-PRODUCE PUBLIC RELATIONS MAN, I THINK I'D BETTER REMIND YOU OF ANOTHER YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN!
NAMELY THAT IN TWO HOURS THE PARK OUTSIDE THIS BUILDING IS GOING TO BE THE SCENE OF A GALA OCCASION!
THE OFFICIAL INAUGURATION OF THE SPANKING NEW SUPER-GROUP CALLED THE CHAMPIONS!
AND LET ME TELL YOU, FRIENDS-- BOTH YOU AND YOUR TEMPORARY HQ. LOOK A MESS.
MAYBE WE'D BETTER CANCEL, DICK! WITH THE WIDOW AND GHOST RIDER BOTH GONE--
--THE GLAD TIDINGS JUST DON'T SEEM TO MAKE ALL THAT MUCH SENSE ANYMORE!
YOU SURE GOT A ROTTEN SENSE OF TIMIN', FLY-BOY! JUST WHEN I WAS ABOUT TO UP AN' ADMIT THAT MAYBE NATASHA WAS RIGHT IN JOININ' THIS GROUP--
--YOU WANNA THROW IN THE TOWEL AN' DISSOLVE IT!
YOU GUYS MAKE ME LAUGH!
IVAN! WAIT!
NOT A CHANCE, BUB!
HOW COME I SUDDENLY FEEL LIKE A LEPER?
'TIS NOT US, STRIPLING--BUT RAGING AGAINST HELPLESSNESS THAT DOTH DRIVE IVAN FROM US!
FAR BE IT FROM ME TO ADVISE A GOD, HERCULES--
--BUT I THINK IVAN'S OLD ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF!

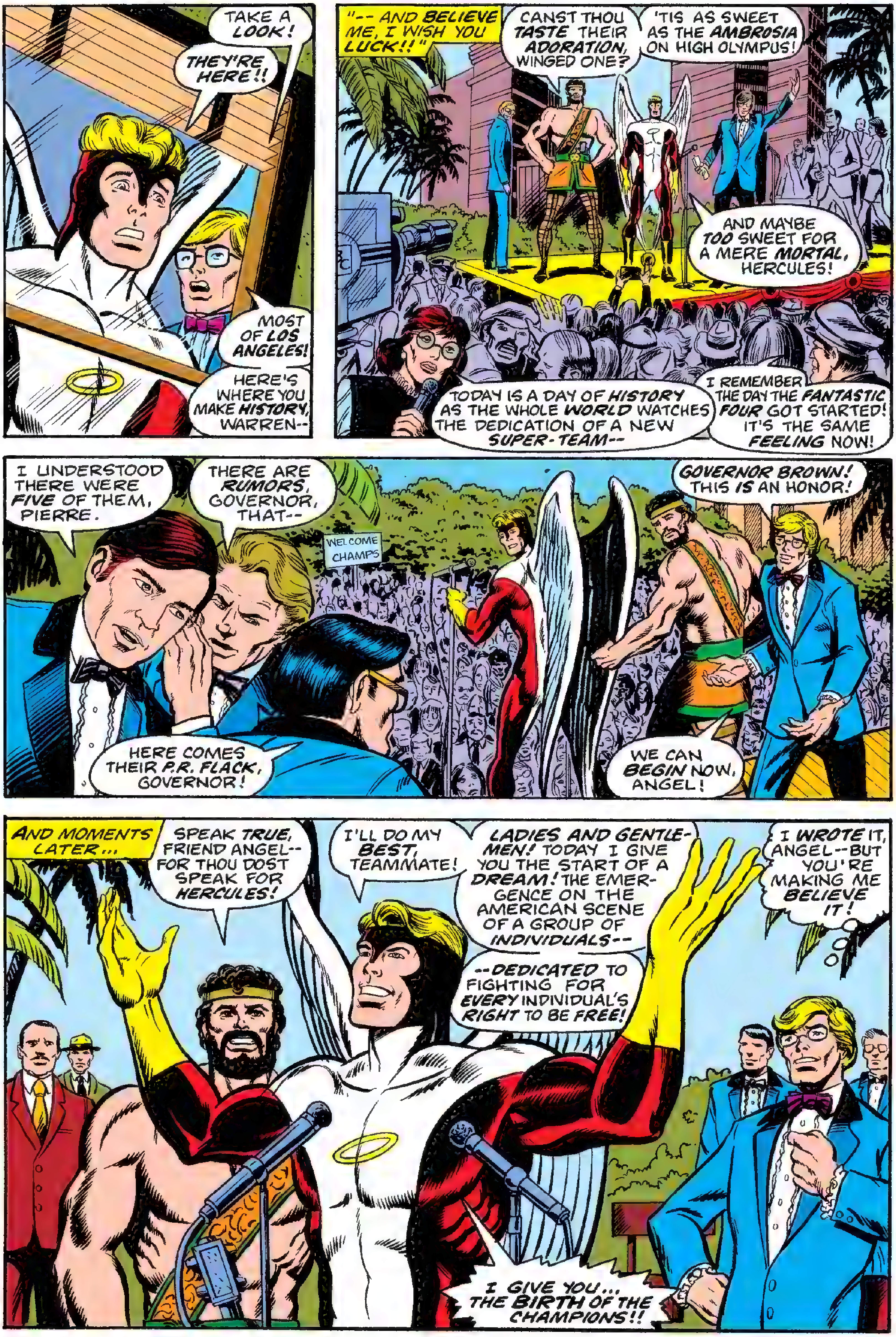

AND WHILE HE COOLS OFF IN THE LAB, FIGURING OUT A WAY TO TRACK DOWN THE WIDOW--
--I SUGGEST WE MAKE LIKE WHITE TORNADOES AND GET THIS PLACE IN SHAPE!
REMIND ME, FRIEND FENSTER, TO TELL THEE SOME TIME OF ONE OF MY MANY LABORS--
--INVOLVING THE CLEANSING OF A KING'S STABLE!
SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF MANURE IF YOU ASK ME!
AND I'M BEGINNING TO THINK THIS K.P. SCENE IS FOR THE BIRDS!
IF YOU DON'T MIND GROUP-- I THINK I'LL GO AND GIVE OUR RESIDENT RUSSIAN A LITTLE MORAL SUPPORT!
GO AHEAD, BOBBY. I'M SURE OUR "HONORED GUESTS" AND GENTLEMEN OF THE PRESS--
--WILL BE JUST AS BORED WITH ONLY HERCULES AND I AS THEY WOULD BE BY THE PRESENCE OF THE WHOLE GROUP!
YOU'RE NOT KIDDING ANYBODY, WARREN! YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT THIS IS GONNA BE THE BIGGEST BLUFF OF YOUR LIFE!
THE OLD DAYS IN PROF. X'S DANGER ROOM ARE STARTING TO SEEM LIKE A PICNIC!
HE'S RIGHT, YOU KNOW.
BELIEVE ME, DICK -- I KNOW!
AND EVEN REPLACING THIS RUINED COSTUME WITH A NEW ONE ISN'T GOING TO THROW A HORDE OF DISASTER-HUNGRY NEWSMEN OFF THE SCENT WHEN THEY START TO SMELL TROUBLE
YOU RECKON WITHOUT THE PRINCE OF POWER, LAD!
WITH HERCULES AT THY SIDE THE MORTALS WILL GIVE NOT A THOUGHT TO ANYTHING BUT THE MAGNIFICENCE OF OUR PRESENCE!
ESPECIALLY IF THERE BE LADIES IN THE AUDIENCE.
FORGIVE US NOW AS WE TRAVEL ACROSS LOS ANGELES TO THE SEA-SIDE OLDER SECTION KNOWN AS VENICE...
...AND FOCUS IN ON A ONCE-ABANDONED WAREHOUSE...
...ABANDONED NO LONGER.
THE WOMAN IS NATASHA ROMANOFF -- BETTER KNOWN TO THE WORLD AS THE BEAUTEOUS BLACK WIDOW.
THE MAN IS ALEXI BRUSKIN -- EX-RUSSIAN KGB CHIEF KNOWN AS THE COMMISSAR...
...AND ALSO THE WIDOW'S TEACHER.*
*LAST ISH--ARCH.

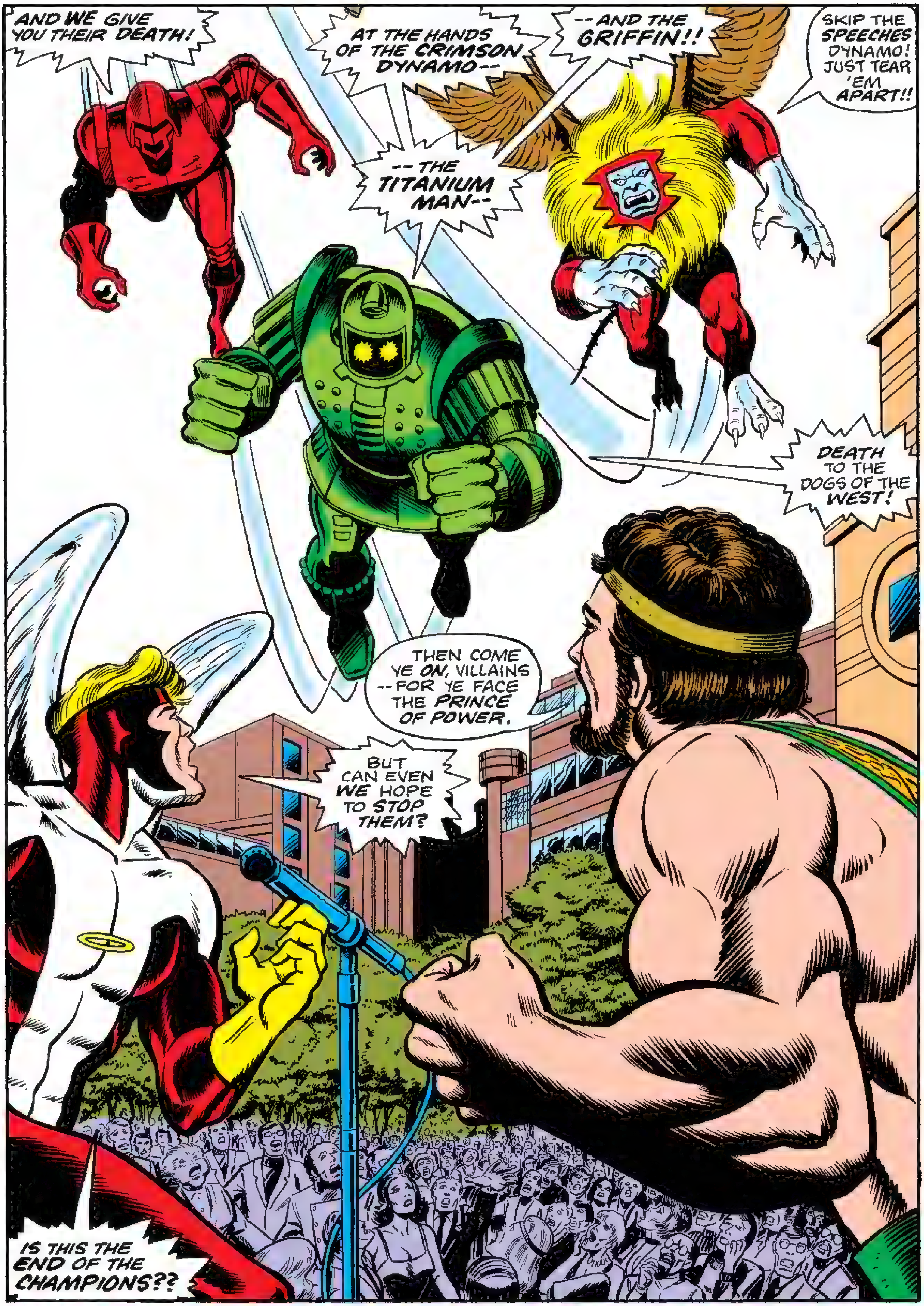

TOO BAD THAT TEACHING WASN'T ENOUGH TO ENABLE HER TO DEAL WITH THE ENERGY-BLASTS OF AN ARMOR-CLAD FOE.
AH. SO YOU ARE AWAKE MADAME NATASHA!
WHO--?
I AM CALLED DARKSTAR, TZARINA --AND THE OTHERS HAVE MADE ME YOUR JAILER.
DO YOU REQUIRE ANYTHING, MADAME?
ONLY ANSWERS, MY FRIEND. WHO ARE THESE OTHERS?
THERE ARE ONLY THREE BESIDES MYSELF, TZARINA. COMRADE BULLSKI--THE TITANIUM MAN--YOU HAVE ALREADY MET--
--WHICH LEAVES ONLY THE GRIFFIN--
--AND YURI!
BUT YOU AND THE COMMISAR WILL MEET US ALL. SOON!
IS BRUSKIN ALL RIGHT!
HE WAS HIT SO HARD--
ONLY AS HARD AS WAS NECESSARY, COMRADE WIDOW!
SO! MY CAPTOR RETURNS!
WHAT NEWS, COMRADE?
ALL GOES WELL, COMRADE DARKSTAR! HOW COULD IT GO OTHERWISE?
COMRADE YURI PLANNED FOR EVERY EVENTUALITY!
BUT IT SEEMS INAPPROPRIATE TO SPEAK OF SUCH THINGS IN FRONT OF OUR GUESTS!
I... SUPPOSE SO, COMRADE! BUT SHE MUST KNOW WHAT IS TO BECOME OF HER--
--AND WHY SHE IS WANTED--
--HOME!
JUST ONE WORD... YET IT IS THE PREFACE TO DESPAIR.


DO I DETECT CONCERN IN YOU FOR AN ENEMY OF THE STATE, COMRADE?
YURI WOULD NOT BE... PLEASED!
THAT IS FOR YURI TO SAY, TITANIUM MAN!
AND I SENSE THERE IS MORE IN YURI'S ATTACK ON THE FAMOUS BLACK WIDOW THAN A MERE DESIRE TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY!
SHE IS...BEAUTIFUL, COMRADE!
TALK! THAT'S ALL YOU RUSSKIES EVER DO--AN' THE GRIFFIN IS GETTIN' SICK OF IT!
WHEN DO WE TEAR INTO THEM, TIN MAN? WHEN DO I MAKE THE ANGEL CRAWL?
WHEN WE GIVE THE WORD, IMPATIENT ONE!
TZRAM!
WHAT--??
WRONG, COMRADE!
IT IS NOT WHEN "WE" GIVE THE WORD, MY FRIEND--
BUT WHEN I GIVE IT!
IT IS THE CRIMSON DYNAMO WHO LEADS!
THE NEW CRIMSON DYNAMO! I-- YURI PETROVITCH!
GIVEN BY THE STATE THE HONOR OF RETURNING THREE EMBARRASSING DEFECTORS! THE BLACK WIDOW... THE COMMISSAR...
...AND ONE OTHER...
"...IVAN PETROVITCH!"
"MY FATHER!!"
OKAY, IVAN--I GIVE UP! I'VE WATCHED YOU TINKER IN THAT LAB FOR THE PAST HOUR--
--AND I STILL HAVEN'T GOT THE FAINTEST IDEA WHAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED!


IT'S A TRACKING SCOPE, KID!
FINE. ONLY WHAT IS IT SUPPOSED TO TRACK?
THIS!
LOOKS LIKE A BLACK PEARL!
IT IS! AND OF A KIND CARRIED BY ONLY ONE MAN IN THE WORLD! ALEXI-BRUSKIN-- THE COMMISSAR!
SEE! ALREADY FREQUENCY IS SHOWING UP ON THE SCOPE! THE PEARL HAS A COMPANION NEARBY.
AND WHERE BRUSKIN IS --THAT'S WHERE I'M BETTIN' WE'LL FIND THE WIDOW!
THEN WHAT'RE WE WAITIN' FOR, FRIEND?
A QUICK ICE-SLIDE WILL HELP US BEAT THE L.A. TRAFFIC SITUATION--
--AND AN ICE-RIGGED SLED WILL ENABLE YOU TO KEEP UP WITH ME!
KID-- I APPOLOGIZE FOR THE WAY I BUSTED UP BEFORE!
YOU GET ME TO THE WIDOW-- AND I'LL SEE THAT YOU'RE KEPT IN POPSICLES FOR A YEAR.
FLY
THE FRIE
YOU'RE ON! AS LONG AS YOU KNOCK IT OFF WITH THE "KID" STUFF... GRAMPS!
AND ACROSS TOWN, YET ANOTHER CHAMPION HAS FOUND A WAY TO BEAT THE RUSH HOUR.
LOS ANGELES HOSPITAL IS JUST UP AHEAD--
--BUT I LOST TRACK OF CLARKE'S HEARTBEAT ABOUT TEN MINUTES AGO!
I HOPE I HAVEN'T OUT-EVILED KNIEVEL FOR NOTHING!
NO. UNH-UNH. NO WAY.
MUST BE THE SMOG IN MY EYES!
M-3
YEAH. IT'S GOTTA BE!


MADE IT! AND PROBABLY SET A RECORD FOR FLAMING SKULL-CYCLES AROUND THE WORLD!
WHAT THE BLAZES--
HOSPITAL
EME
SKREEEE
I BRING YOU A FELLOW MORTAL IN NEED OF AID, HUMAN!
HEY! YOU JUST CAN'T BARGE IN LIKE THIS AND DUMP A DEAD MAN ON US!
NOT WITHOUT AN EXPLANATION!
EMERGENCY EX
NO PARK
SUCH AN EXPLANATION WOULD MEAN THIS MORTAL'S DEATH--
-- AND YOU, FOOL, WOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR IT!
SEE TO IT THAT HE IS CARED FOR--
--OR I WILL RETURN AND SEEK YOU OUT!
HUH? OH, YEAH!
SURE!
WHATEVER YOU SAY!
QUIT YAMMERIN'! WE GOT US A PATIENT!
EXIT
EMERGENCY AMBULANCE
AND...
I THOUGHT I DITCHED THIS OUTFIT WHEN I LEFT THE X-MEN!
IT WAKES UP A LOT OF MEMORIES, DICK!
I WISH YOU'D TOLD ME THAT BEFORE YOU POINTED OUT THAT I'D GOT THE COLORS WRONG!
I CAN LIVE WITH IT!
YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO, FLY-BOY!
BECAUSE WE'VE JUST RUN OUT OF TIME!
HUH?


TAKE A LOOK!
THEY'RE HERE!!
MOST OF LOS ANGELES!
HERE'S WHERE YOU MAKE HISTORY, WARREN--
"-- AND BELIEVE ME, I WISH YOU LUCK!!"
CANST THOU TASTE THEIR ADORATION, WINGED ONE?
'TIS AS SWEET AS THE AMBROSIA ON HIGH OLYMPUS!
AND MAYBE TOO SWEET FOR A MERE MORTAL, HERCULES!
TODAY IS A DAY OF HISTORY AS THE WHOLE WORLD WATCHES THE DEDICATION OF A NEW SUPER-TEAM--
I REMEMBER THE DAY THE FANTASTIC FOUR GOT STARTED! IT'S THE SAME FEELING NOW!
I UNDERSTOOD THERE WERE FIVE OF THEM, PIERRE.
THERE ARE RUMORS, GOVERNOR, THAT--
WELCOME CHAMPS
HERE COMES THEIR P.R. FLACK, GOVERNOR!
GOVERNOR BROWN! THIS IS AN HONOR!
WE CAN BEGIN NOW, ANGEL!
AND MOMENTS LATER...
SPEAK TRUE, FRIEND ANGEL-- FOR THOU DOST SPEAK FOR HERCULES!
I'LL DO MY BEST, TEAMMATE!
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! TODAY I GIVE YOU THE START OF A DREAM! THE EMERGENCE ON THE AMERICAN SCENE OF A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS--
--DEDICATED TO FIGHTING FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT TO BE FREE!
I WROTE IT, ANGEL--BUT YOU'RE MAKING ME BELIEVE IT!
I GIVE YOU... THE BIRTH OF THE CHAMPIONS!!


AND WE GIVE YOU THEIR DEATH!
AT THE HANDS OF THE CRIMSON DYNAMO--
--AND THE GRIFFIN!!
SKIP THE SPEECHES DYNAMO! JUST TEAR 'EM APART!!
--THE TITANIUM MAN--
DEATH TO THE DOGS OF THE WEST!
THEN COME YE ON, VILLAINS --FOR YE FACE THE PRINCE OF POWER.
BUT CAN EVEN WE HOPE TO STOP THEM?
IS THIS THE END OF THE CHAMPIONS??

NEXT: THE BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES!

THE CHAMPIONS
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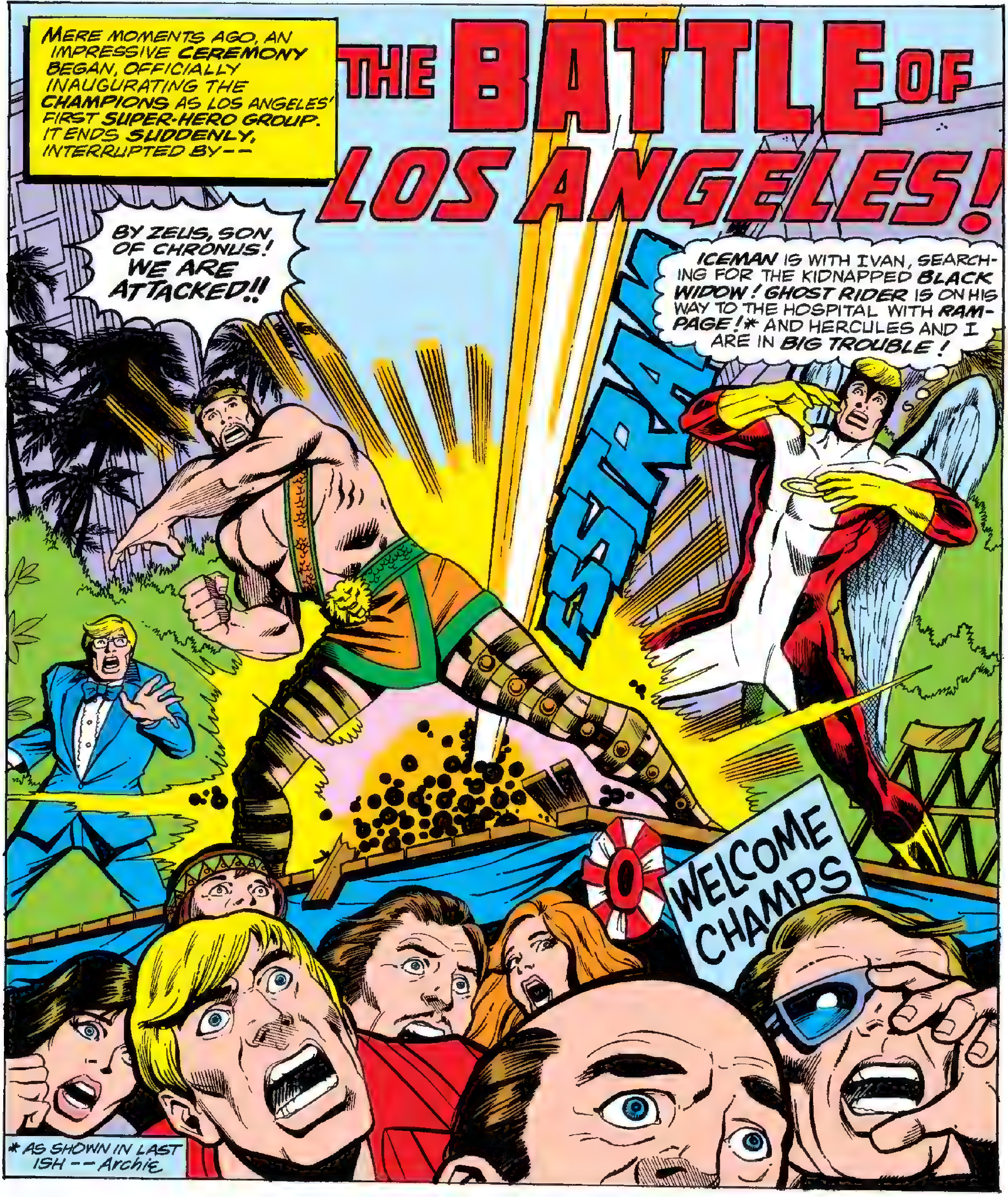
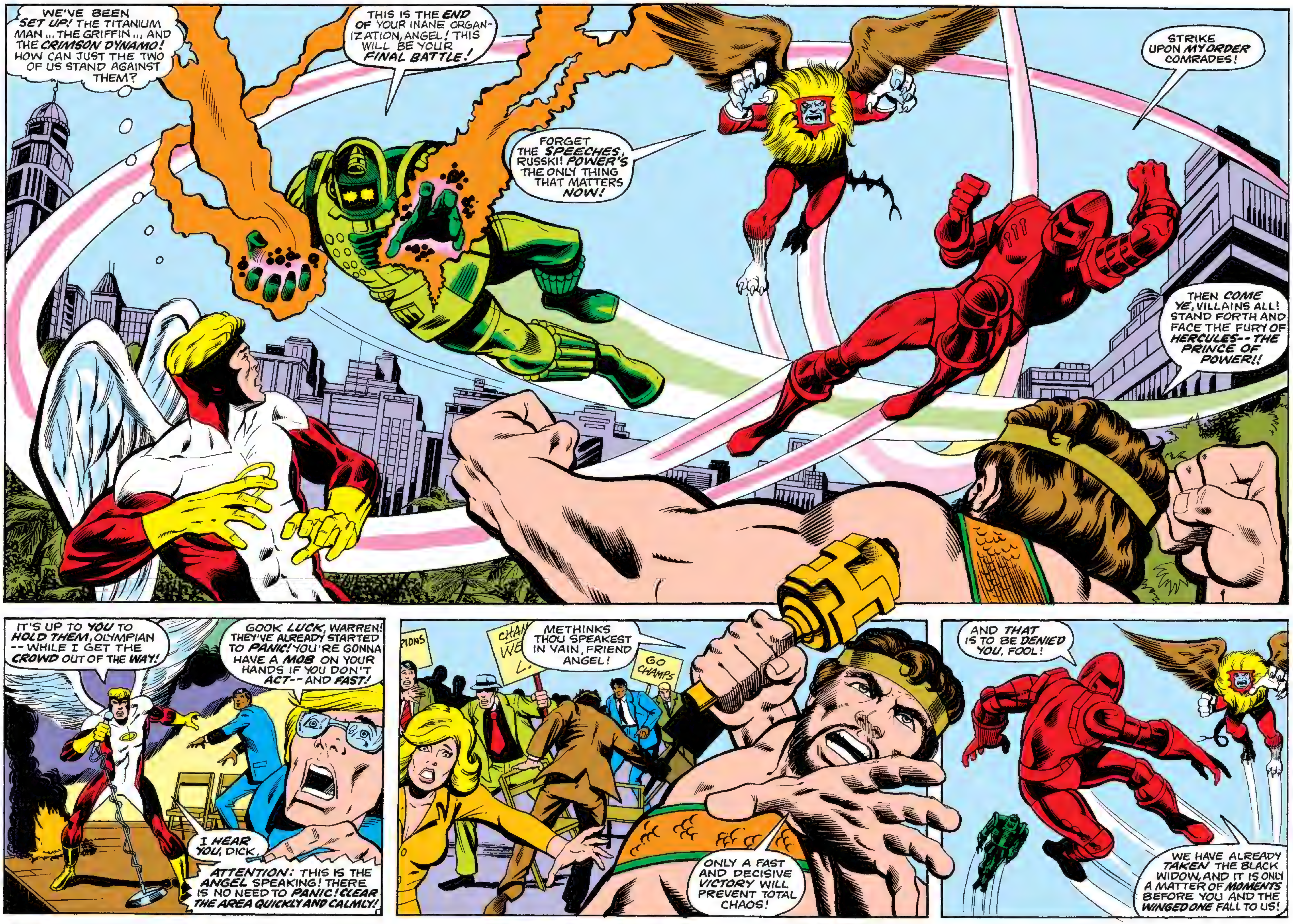
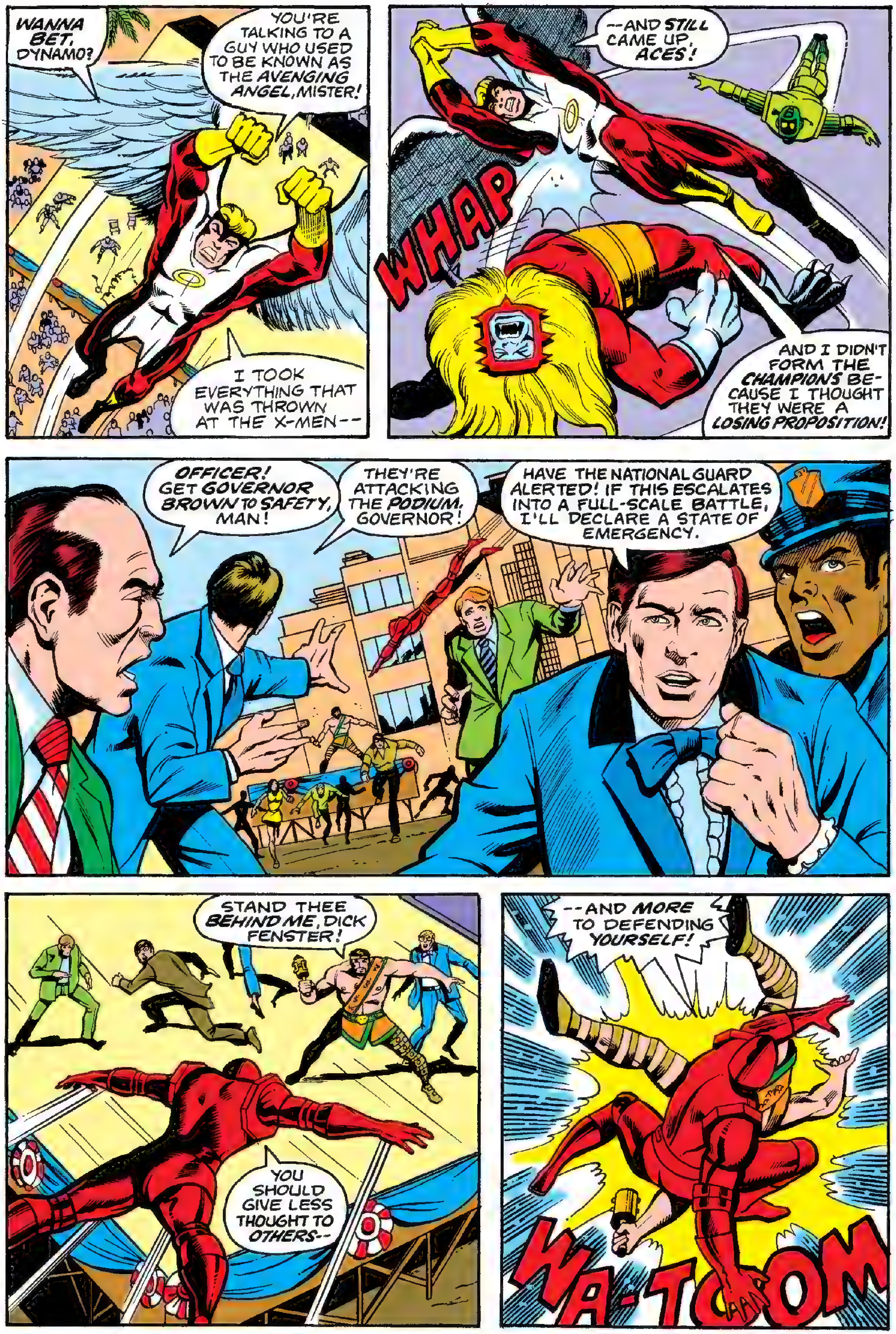
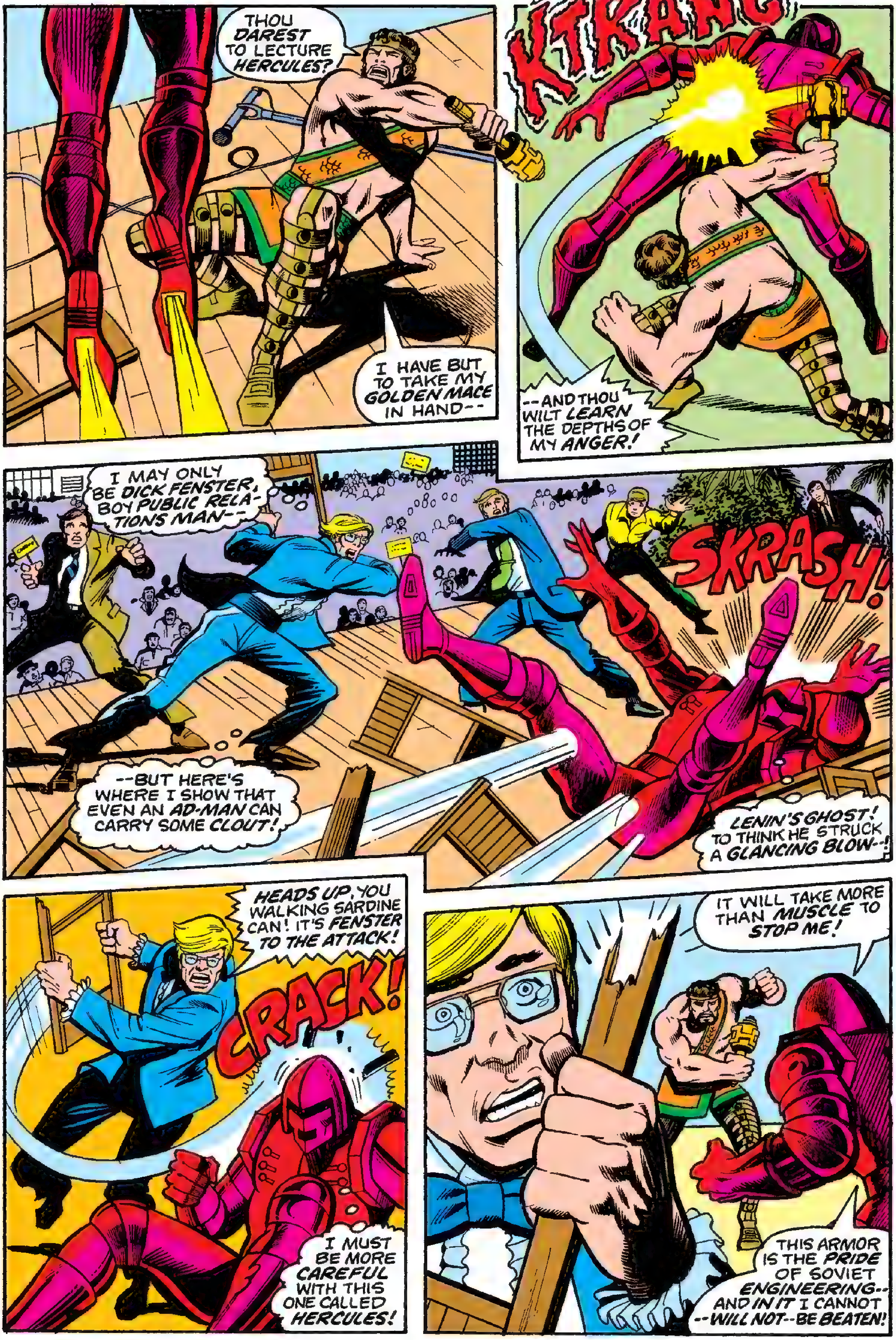
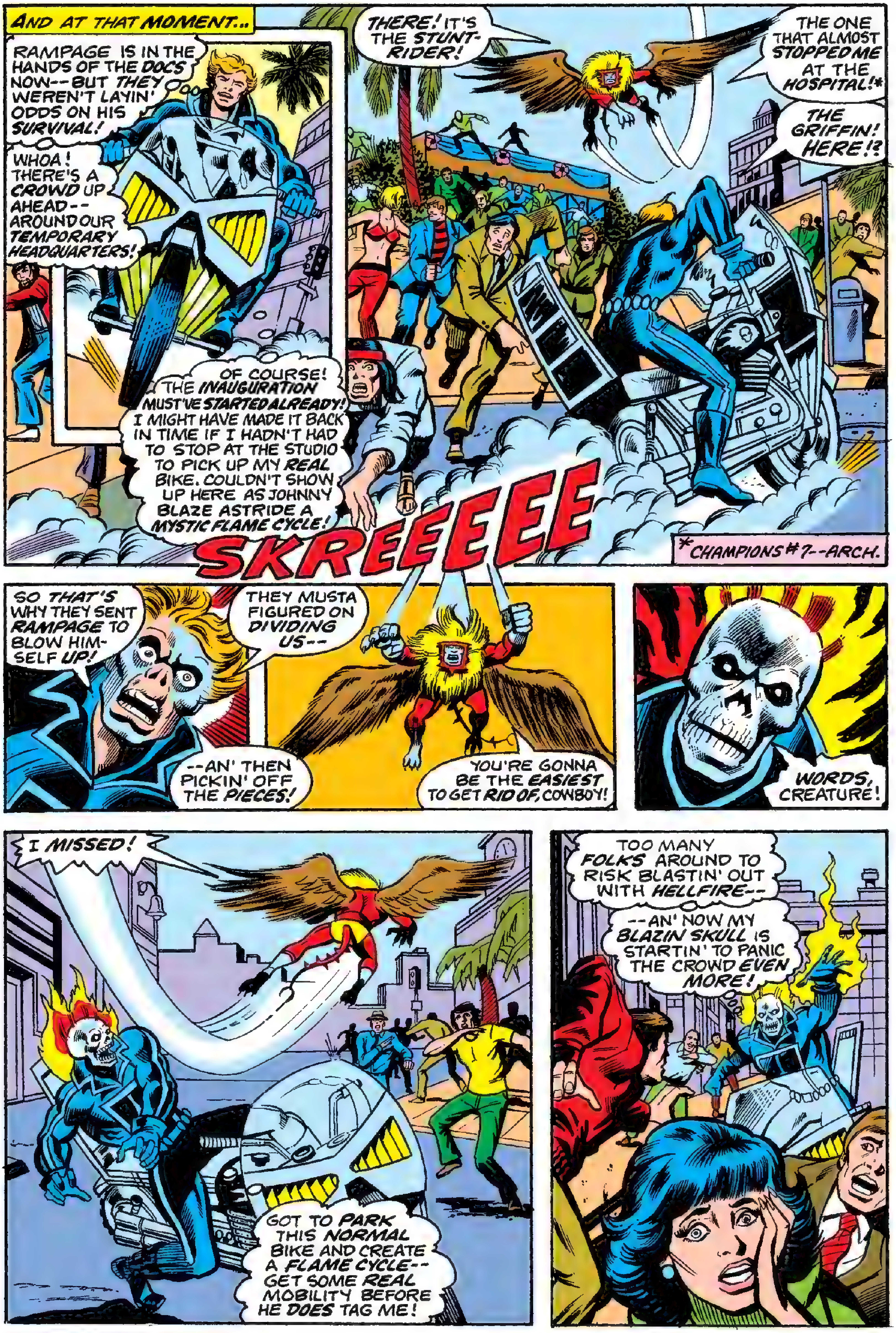
THE BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES!

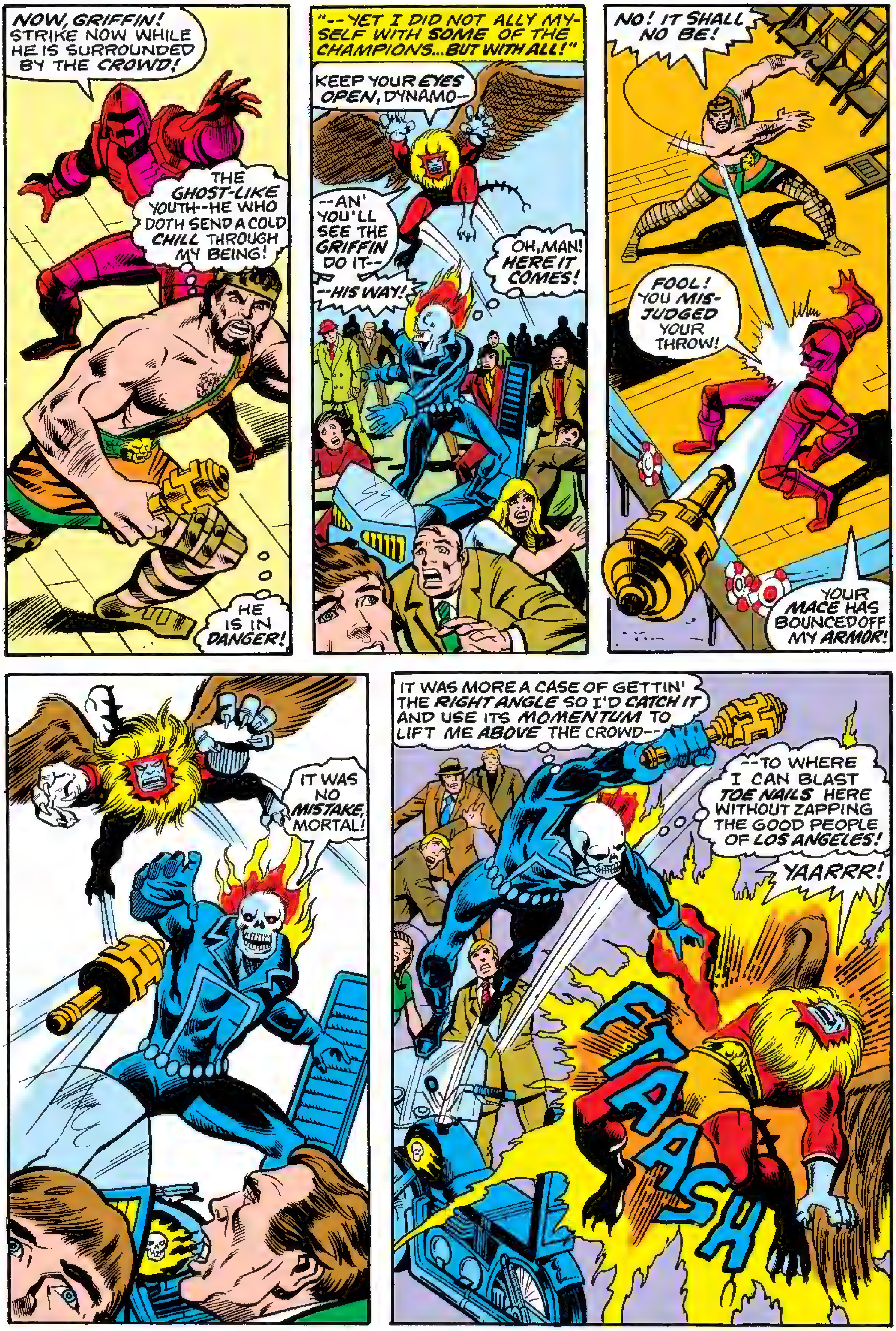

MERE MOMENTS AGO, AN IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY BEGAN, OFFICIALLY INAUGURATING THE CHAMPIONS AS LOS ANGELES' FIRST SUPER-HERO GROUP. IT ENDS SUDDENLY, INTERRUPTED BY--
BY ZEUS, SON OF CHRONUS! WE ARE ATTACKED!!
ESTRAK
ICEMAN IS WITH IVAN, SEARCHING FOR THE KIDNAPPED BLACK WIDOW! GHOST RIDER IS ON HIS WAY TO THE HOSPITAL WITH RAMPAGE!* AND HERCULES AND I ARE IN BIG TROUBLE!
WELCOME CHAMPS
* AS SHOWN IN LAST ISH -- Archie

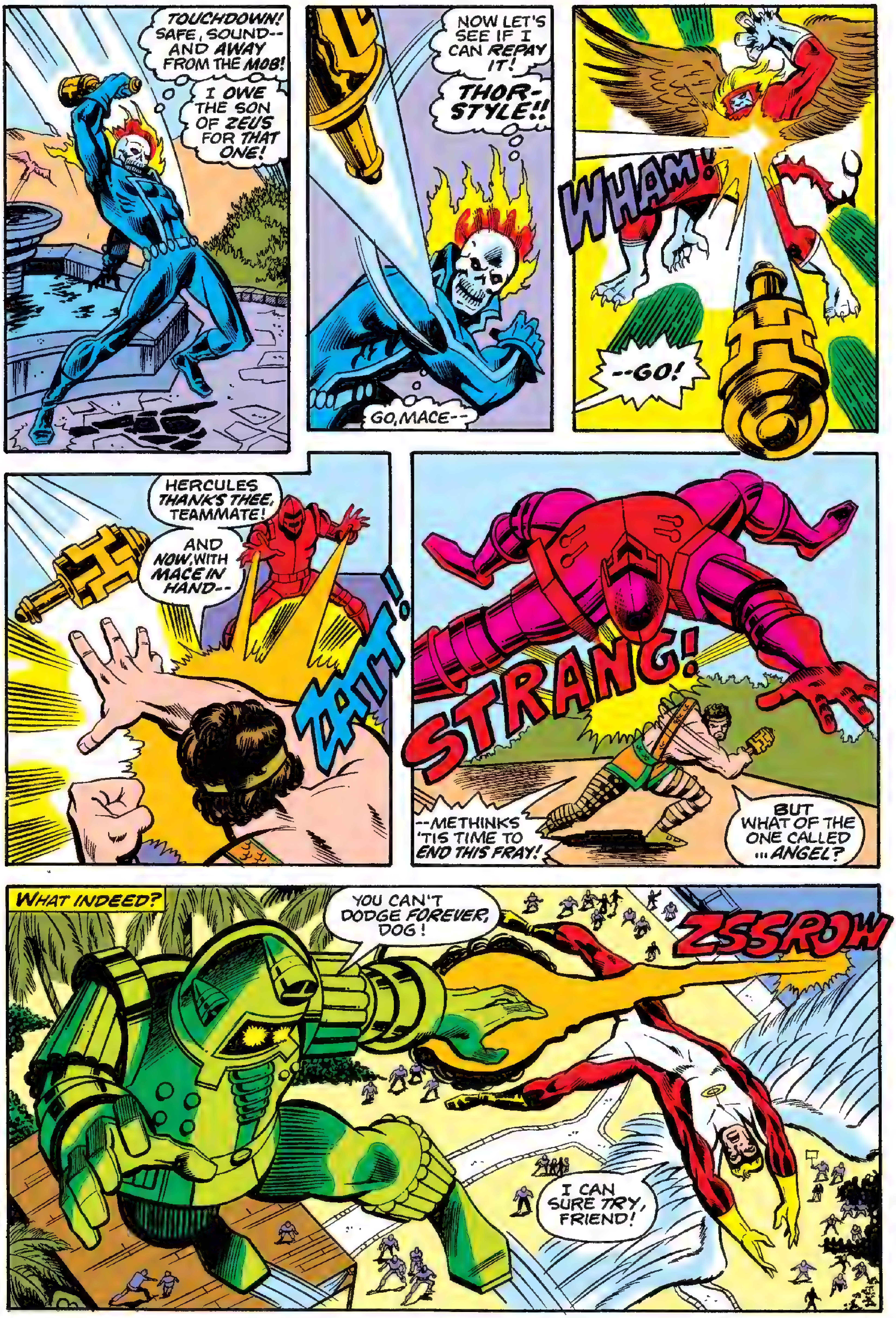

WE'VE BEEN SET UP! THE TITANIUM MAN ... THE GRIFFIN ... AND THE CRIMSON DYNAMO! HOW CAN JUST THE TWO OF US STAND AGAINST THEM?
THIS IS THE END OF YOUR INANE ORGANIZATION, ANGEL! THIS WILL BE YOUR FINAL BATTLE!
FORGET THE SPEECHES, RUSSKI! POWER'S THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS NOW!
STRIKE UPON MY ORDER COMRADES!
THEN COME YE, VILLAINS ALL! STAND FORTH AND FACE THE FURY OF HERCULES-- THE PRINCE OF POWER!!
IT'S UP TO YOU TO HOLD THEM, OLYMPIAN -- WHILE I GET THE CROWD OUT OF THE WAY!
GOOK LUCK, WARREN! THEY'VE ALREADY STARTED TO PANIC! YOU'RE GONNA HAVE A MOB ON YOUR HANDS IF YOU DON'T ACT-- AND FAST!
I HEAR YOU, DICK.
ATTENTION: THIS IS THE ANGEL SPEAKING! THERE IS NO NEED TO PANIC! CLEAR THE AREA QUICKLY AND CALMLY!
METHINKS THOU SPEAKEST IN VAIN, FRIEND ANGEL!
GO CHAMPS
ONLY A FAST AND DECISIVE VICTORY WILL PREVENT TOTAL CHAOS!
AND THAT IS TO BE DENIED YOU, FOOL!
WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN THE BLACK WIDOW, AND IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF MOMENTS BEFORE YOU AND THE WINGED ONE FALL TO US!

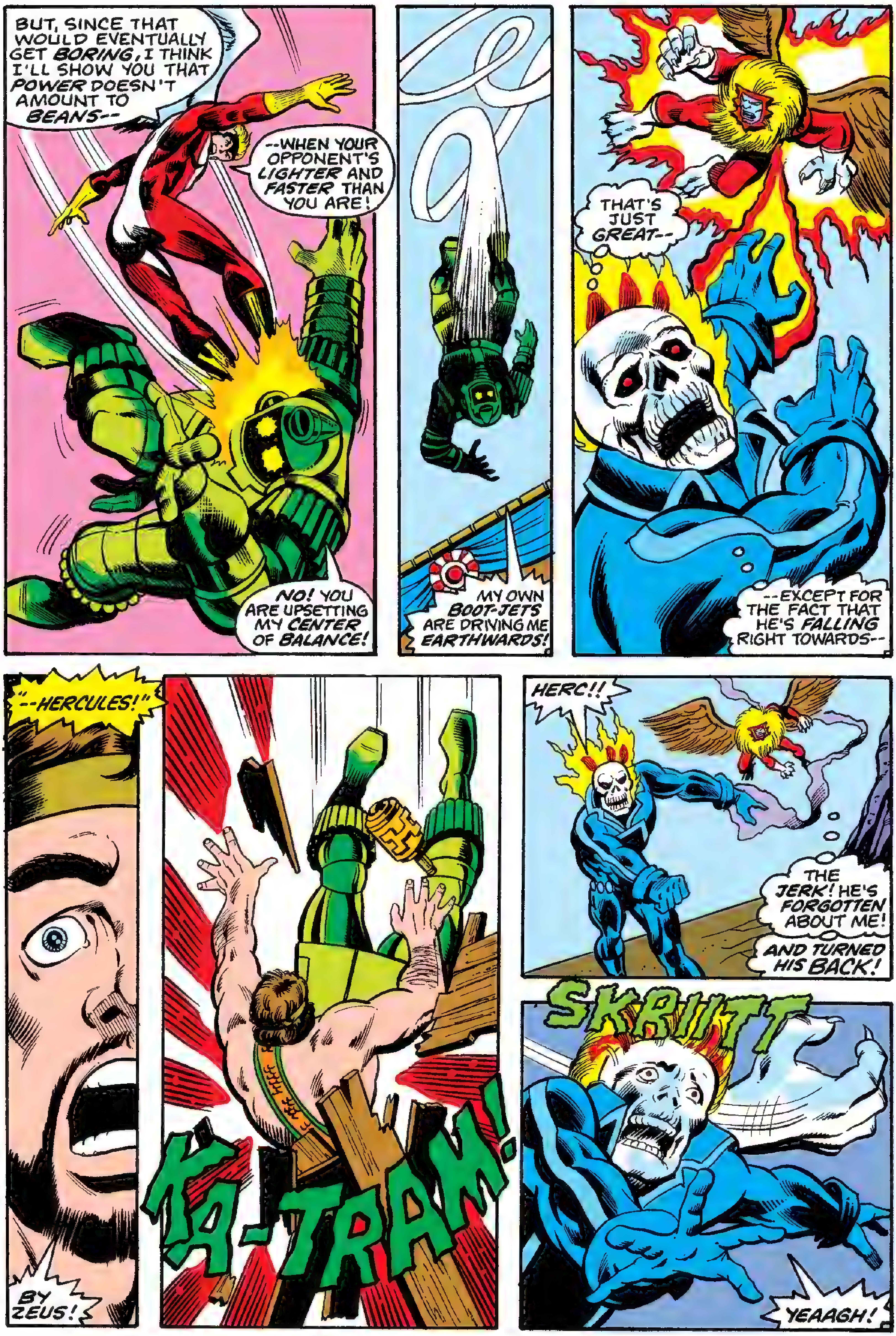

WANNA BET, DYNAMO?
YOU'RE TALKING TO A GUY WHO USED TO BE KNOWN AS THE *AVENGING ANGEL*, MISTER!
I TOOK EVERYTHING THAT WAS THROWN AT THE X-MEN--
--AND *STILL* CAME UP *ACES*!
WHAP
AND I DIDN'T FORM THE *CHAMPIONS* BECAUSE I THOUGHT THEY WERE A *LOSING PROPOSITION*!
OFFICER! GET *GOVERNOR BROWN* TO *SAFETY*, MAN!
THEY'RE ATTACKING THE *PODIUM*, GOVERNOR!
HAVE THE NATIONAL GUARD ALERTED! IF THIS ESCALATES INTO A FULL-SCALE BATTLE, I'LL DECLARE A STATE OF EMERGENCY.
STAND THEE *BEHIND ME*, DICK FENSTER!
YOU SHOULD GIVE LESS THOUGHT TO *OTHERS*--
--AND *MORE* TO DEFENDING *YOURSELF*!
WA-TOOOM

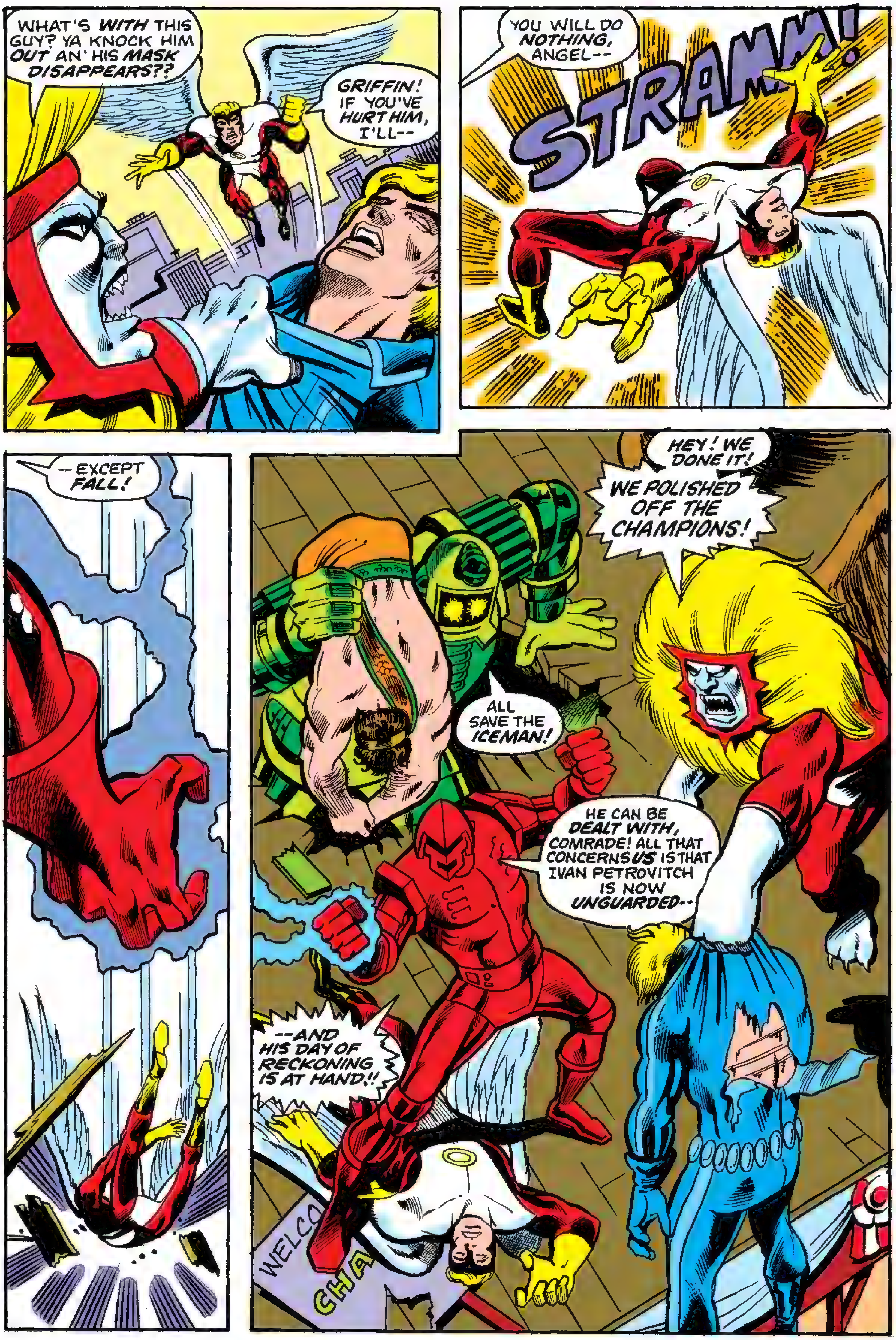

THOU DAREST TO LECTURE HERCULES?
I HAVE BUT TO TAKE MY GOLDEN MACE IN HAND--
KTRANG
--AND THOU WILT LEARN THE DEPTHS OF MY ANGER!
I MAY ONLY BE DICK FENSTER, BOY PUBLIC RELATIONS MAN--
--BUT HERE'S WHERE I SHOW THAT EVEN AN AD-MAN CAN CARRY SOME CLOUT!
SKRASH!
LENIN'S GHOST! TO THINK HE STRUCK A GLANCING BLOW--!
HEADS UP, YOU WALKING SARDINE CAN! IT'S FENSTER TO THE ATTACK!
CRACK!
I MUST BE MORE CAREFUL WITH THIS ONE CALLED HERCULES!
IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN MUSCLE TO STOP ME!
THIS ARMOR IS THE PRIDE OF SOVIET ENGINEERING--AND IN IT I CANNOT --WILL NOT--BE BEATEN!

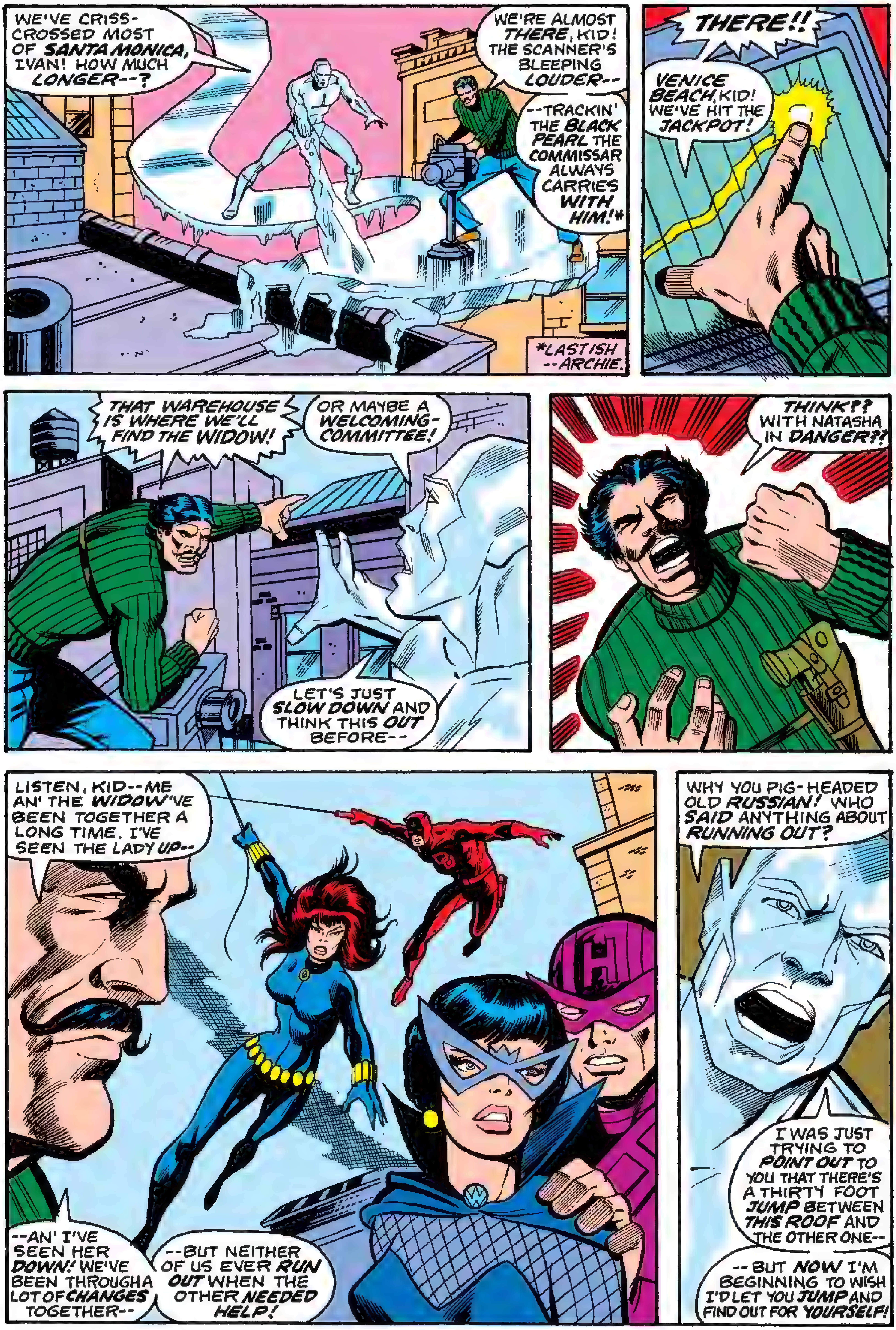

AND AT THAT MOMENT...
RAMPAGE IS IN THE HANDS OF THE DOCS NOW-- BUT THEY WEREN'T LAYIN' ODDS ON HIS SURVIVAL!
WHOA! THERE'S A CROWD UP AHEAD-- AROUND OUR TEMPORARY HEADQUARTERS!
THERE! IT'S THE STUNT-RIDER!
THE ONE THAT ALMOST STOPPED ME AT THE HOSPITAL!*
THE GRIFFIN! HERE!?
OF COURSE! THE INAUGURATION MUST'VE STARTED ALREADY! I MIGHT HAVE MADE IT BACK IN TIME IF I HADN'T HAD TO STOP AT THE STUDIO TO PICK UP MY REAL BIKE. COULDN'T SHOW UP HERE AS JOHNNY BLAZE ASTRIDE A MYSTIC FLAME CYCLE!
SKREEEEEE
*CHAMPIONS #7--ARCH.
SO THAT'S WHY THEY SENT RAMPAGE TO BLOW HIMSELF UP!
THEY MUSTA FIGURED ON DIVIDING US--
--AN' THEN PICKIN' OFF THE PIECES!
YOU'RE GONNA BE THE EASIEST TO GET RID OF, COWBOY!
WORDS, CREATURE!
I MISSED!
GOT TO PARK THIS NORMAL BIKE AND CREATE A FLAME CYCLE-- GET SOME REAL MOBILITY BEFORE HE DOES TAG ME!
TOO MANY FOLKS AROUND TO RISK BLASTIN' OUT WITH HELLFIRE--
--AN' NOW MY BLAZIN SKULL IS STARTIN' TO PANIC THE CROWD EVEN MORE!]

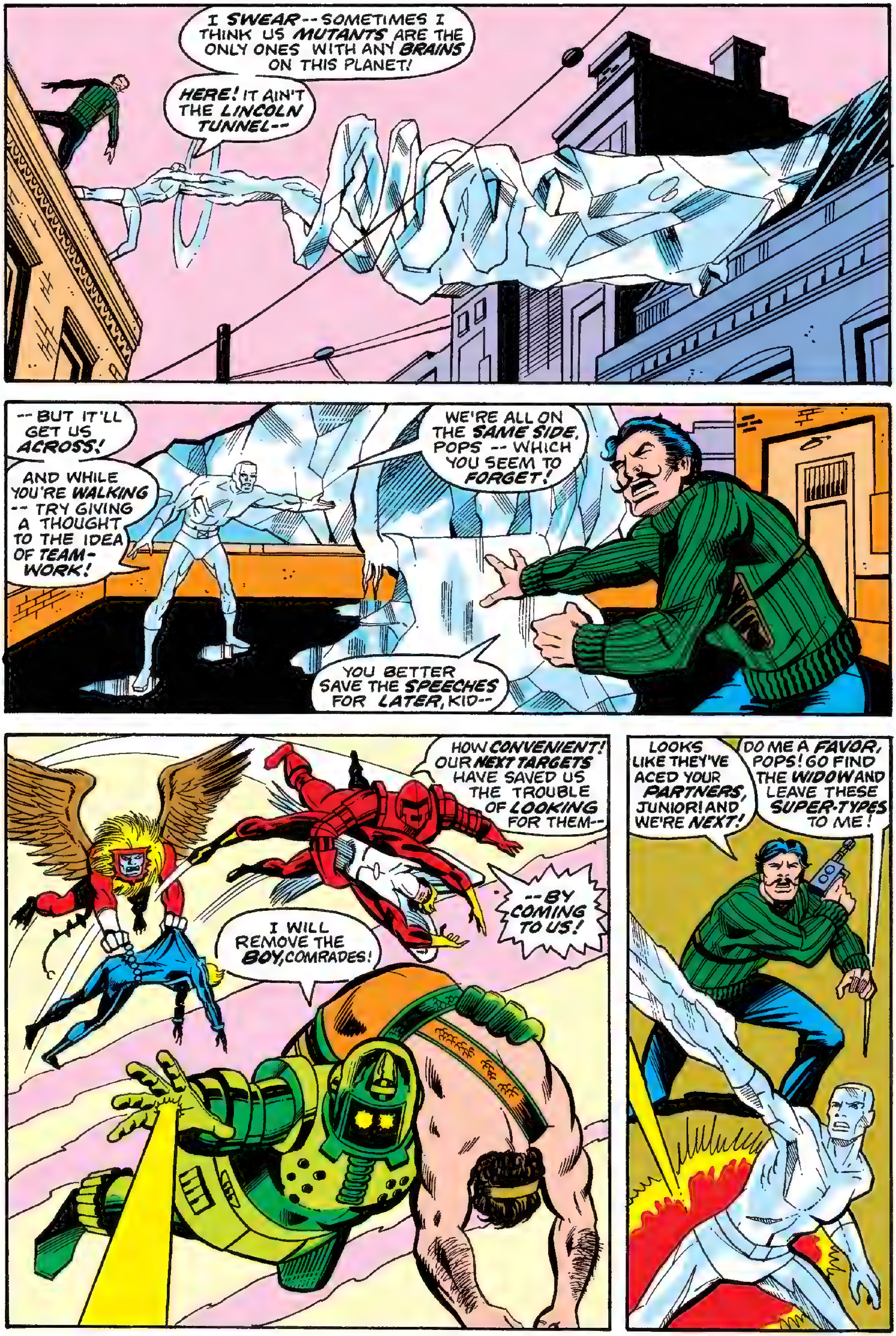

NOW, GRIFFIN! STRIKE NOW WHILE HE IS SURROUNDED BY THE CROWD!
THE GHOST-LIKE YOUTH--HE WHO DOTH SEND A COLD CHILL THROUGH MY BEING!
HE IS IN DANGER!
"--YET I DID NOT ALLY MYSELF WITH SOME OF THE CHAMPIONS...BUT WITH ALL!"
KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN, DYNAMO--
--AN' YOU'LL SEE THE GRIFFIN DO IT--
--HIS WAY!
OH, MAN! HERE IT COMES!
NO! IT SHALL NO BE!
FOOL! YOU MISJUDGED YOUR THROW!
YOUR MACE HAS BOUNCED OFF MY ARMOR!
IT WAS NO MISTAKE, MORTAL!
IT WAS MORE A CASE OF GETTIN' THE RIGHT ANGLE SO I'D CATCH IT AND USE ITS MOMENTUM TO LIFT ME ABOVE THE CROWD--
--TO WHERE I CAN BLAST TOE NAILS HERE WITHOUT ZAPPING THE GOOD PEOPLE OF LOS ANGELES!
YAARRR!
FTAASH

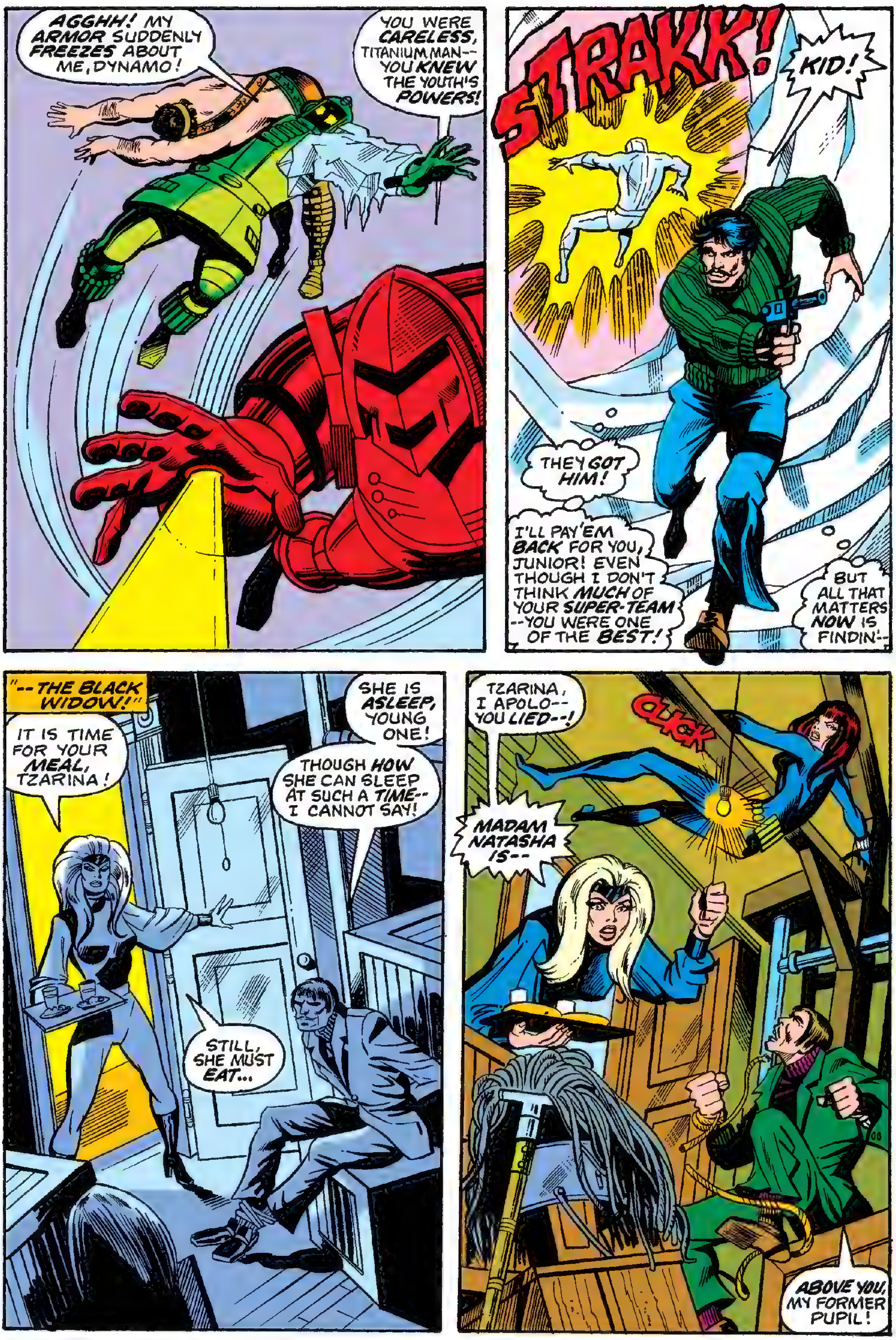

TOUCHDOWN! SAFE, SOUND-- AND AWAY FROM THE MOB!
I OWE THE SON OF ZEUS FOR THAT ONE!
NOW LET'S SEE IF I CAN REPAY IT!
THOR-STYLE!!
GO, MACE--
WHAM!
--GO!
HERCULES THANK'S THEE, TEAMMATE!
AND NOW, WITH MACE IN HAND--
ZATT!
STRANG!
--METHINKS 'TIS TIME TO END THIS FRAY!
BUT WHAT OF THE ONE CALLED ...ANGEL?
WHAT INDEED?
YOU CAN'T DODGE FOREVER, DOG!
ZSSROW
I CAN SURE TRY, FRIEND!

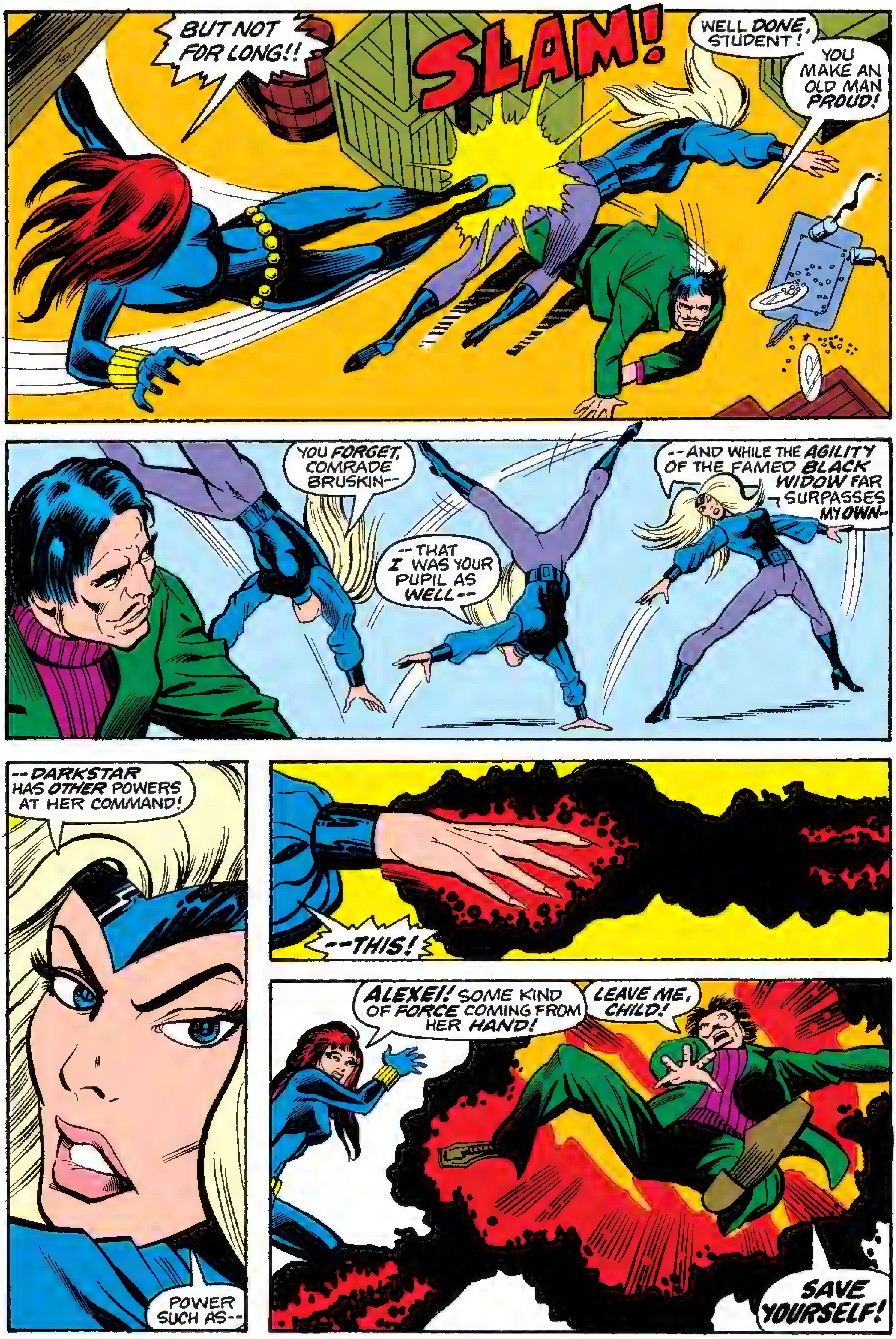

BUT, SINCE THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY GET *BORING*, I THINK I'LL SHOW YOU THAT *POWER* DOESN'T AMOUNT TO *BEANS*--
--WHEN YOUR OPPONENT'S *LIGHTER* AND *FASTER* THAN YOU ARE!
NO! YOU ARE UPSETTING MY *CENTER* OF *BALANCE!*
MY OWN *BOOT-JETS* ARE DRIVING ME *EARTHWARDS!*
THAT'S JUST *GREAT*--
--EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT HE'S *FALLING* RIGHT TOWARDS--
"--*HERCULES!*"
BY ZEUS!
KA-TRAM!
HERC!!
THE *JERK!* HE'S *FORGOTTEN* ABOUT ME!
AND TURNED HIS BACK!
SKRIITT
YEAAGH!

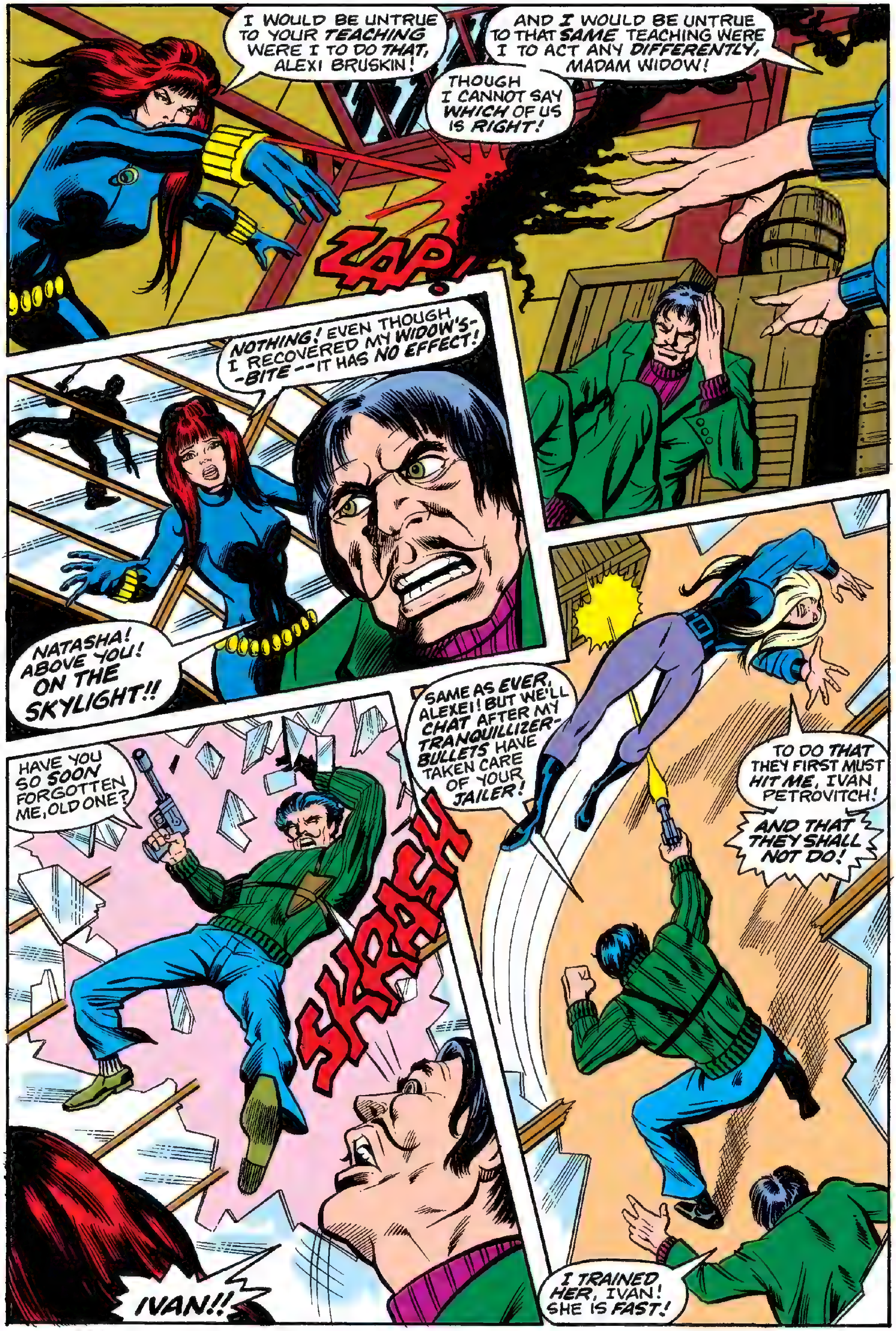

WHAT'S WITH THIS GUY? YA KNOCK HIM OUT AN' HIS MASK DISAPPEARS??
GRIFFIN! IF YOU'VE HURT HIM, I'LL--
YOU WILL DO NOTHING, ANGEL--
STRAMM!
--EXCEPT FALL!
HEY! WE DONE IT!
WE POLISHED OFF THE CHAMPIONS!
ALL SAVE THE ICEMAN!
HE CAN BE DEALT WITH, COMRADE! ALL THAT CONCERNS US IS THAT IVAN PETROVITCH IS NOW UNGUARDED--
--AND HIS DAY OF RECKONING IS AT HAND!!
WELCO
CHA

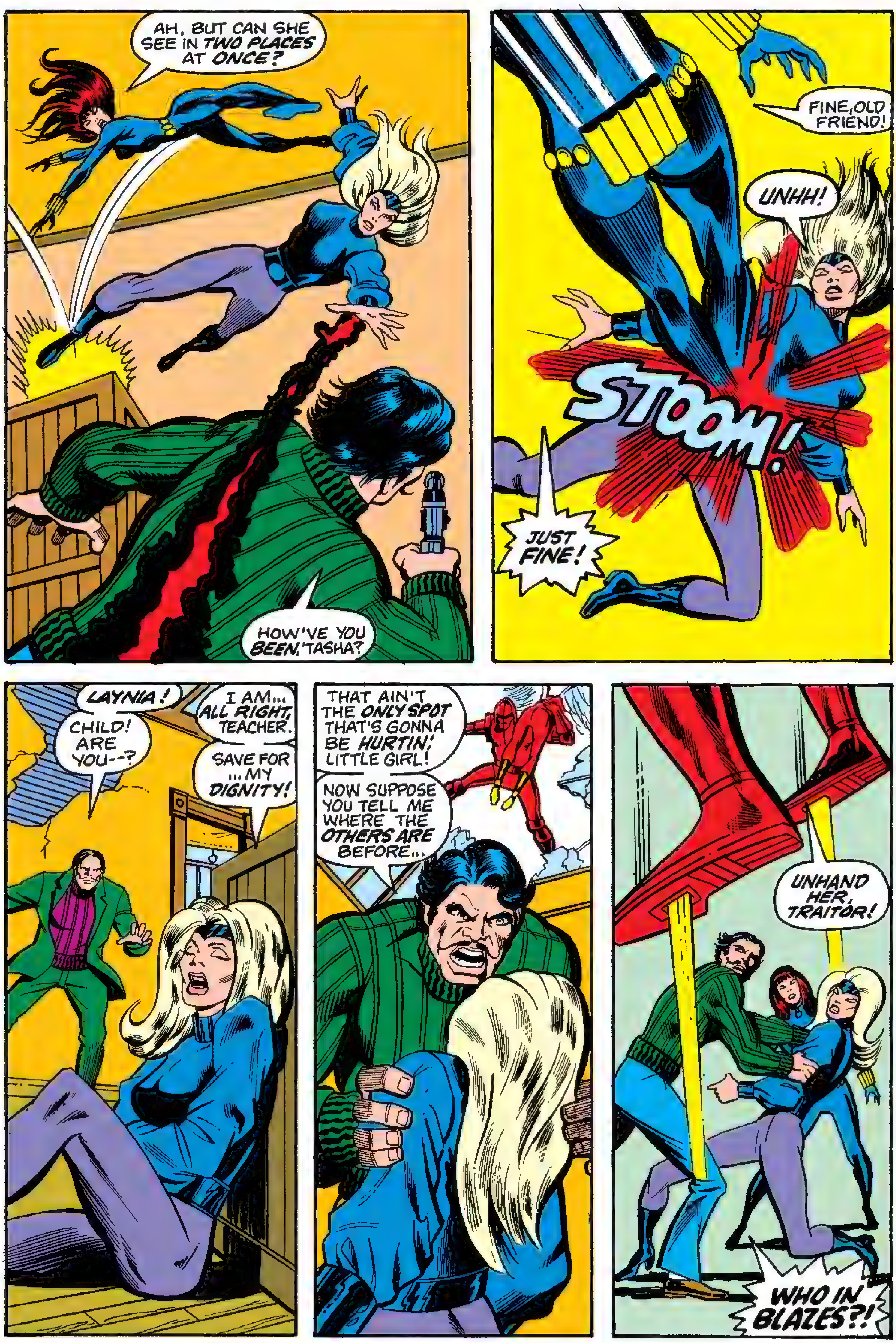

WE'VE CRISS-CROSSED MOST OF **SANTA MONICA**, IVAN! HOW MUCH **LONGER**--?
WE'RE ALMOST **THERE**, KID! THE SCANNER'S BLEEPING **LOUDER**--
--TRACKIN' THE **BLACK PEARL** THE **COMMISSAR** ALWAYS CARRIES **WITH HIM!***
*LAST ISH --ARCHIE.
THERE!!
VENICE BEACH, KID! WE'VE HIT THE **JACKPOT!**
THAT WAREHOUSE IS WHERE WE'LL FIND THE WIDOW!
OR MAYBE A **WELCOMING-COMMITTEE!**
LET'S JUST **SLOW DOWN** AND THINK THIS **OUT** BEFORE--
THINK?? WITH NATASHA IN **DANGER??**
LISTEN, KID--ME AN' THE **WIDOW**'VE BEEN TOGETHER A LONG TIME. I'VE SEEN THE LADY **UP**--
--AN' I'VE SEEN HER **DOWN!** WE'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT OF **CHANGES** TOGETHER--
--BUT NEITHER OF US EVER **RUN OUT** WHEN THE OTHER **NEEDED HELP!**
WHY YOU PIG-HEADED OLD **RUSSIAN!** WHO **SAID** ANYTHING ABOUT **RUNNING OUT**?
I WAS JUST TRYING TO **POINT OUT** TO YOU THAT THERE'S A THIRTY FOOT **JUMP** BETWEEN **THIS ROOF** AND THE OTHER ONE--
--BUT **NOW** I'M BEGINNING TO WISH I'D LET YOU **JUMP** AND FIND OUT FOR **YOURSELF!**

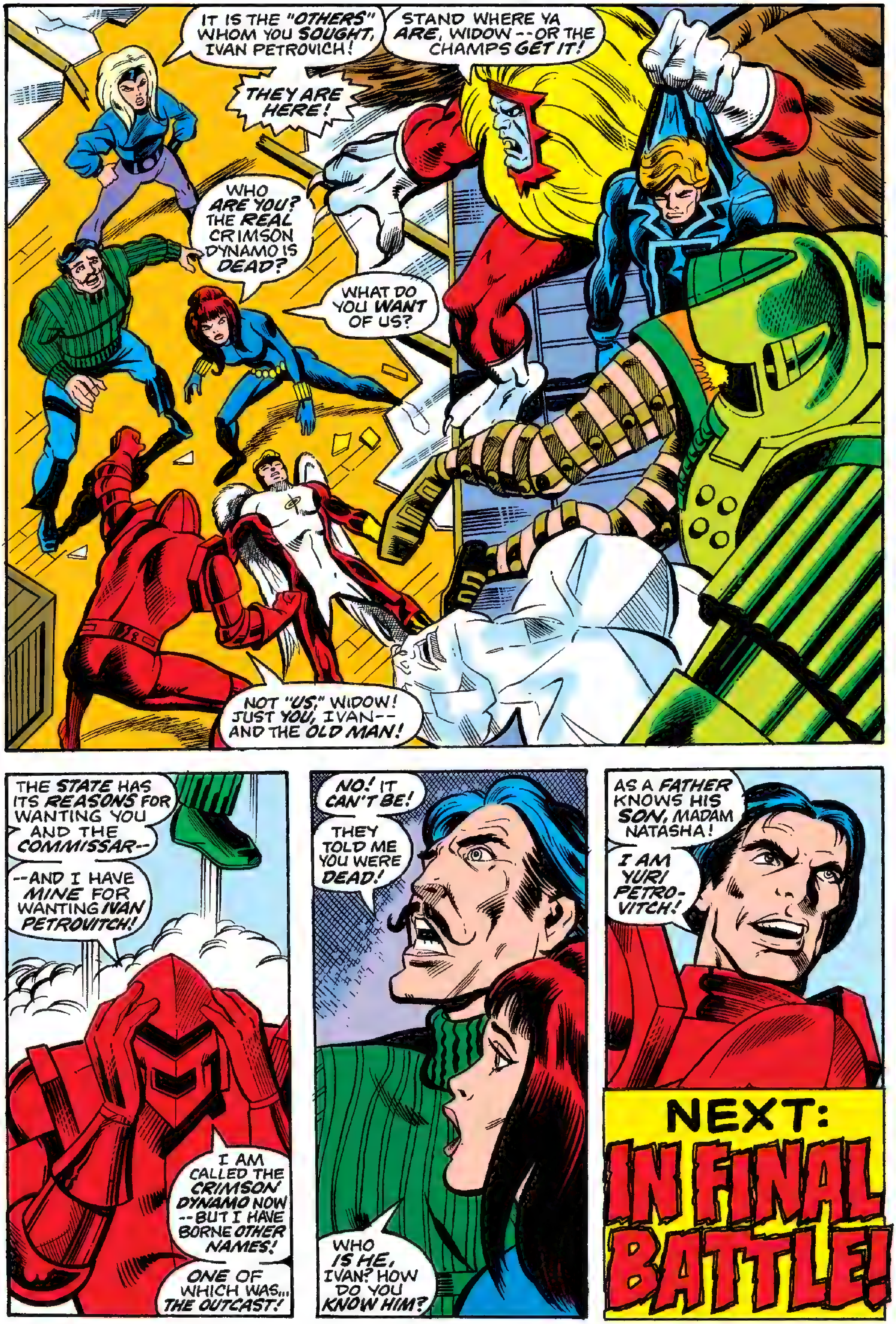

I SWEAR--SOMETIMES I THINK US MUTANTS ARE THE ONLY ONES WITH ANY BRAINS ON THIS PLANET!
HERE! IT AIN'T THE LINCOLN TUNNEL--
--BUT IT'LL GET US ACROSS!
AND WHILE YOU'RE WALKING -- TRY GIVING A THOUGHT TO THE IDEA OF TEAM-WORK!
WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME SIDE, POPS -- WHICH YOU SEEM TO FORGET!
YOU BETTER SAVE THE SPEECHES FOR LATER, KID--
HOW CONVENIENT! OUR NEXT TARGETS HAVE SAVED US THE TROUBLE OF LOOKING FOR THEM--
--BY COMING TO US!
I WILL REMOVE THE BOY, COMRADES!
LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE ACED YOUR PARTNERS, JUNIOR! AND WE'RE NEXT!
DO ME A FAVOR, POPS! GO FIND THE WIDOW AND LEAVE THESE SUPER-TYPES TO ME!


AGGHH! MY ARMOR SUDDENLY FREEZES ABOUT ME, DYNAMO!
YOU WERE CARELESS, TITANIUM MAN--YOU KNEW THE YOUTH'S POWERS!
STRAKK!
KID!
THEY GOT HIM!
I'LL PAY 'EM BACK FOR YOU, JUNIOR! EVEN THOUGH I DON'T THINK MUCH OF YOUR SUPER-TEAM --YOU WERE ONE OF THE BEST!
BUT ALL THAT MATTERS NOW IS FINDIN'--
"--THE BLACK WIDOW!"
IT IS TIME FOR YOUR MEAL, TZARINA!
SHE IS ASLEEP, YOUNG ONE!
THOUGH HOW SHE CAN SLEEP AT SUCH A TIME--I CANNOT SAY!
STILL, SHE MUST EAT...
TZARINA, I APOLO--YOU LIED--!
CLICK
MADAM NATASHA IS--
ABOVE YOU, MY FORMER PUPIL!


BUT NOT FOR LONG!!
SLAM!
WELL DONE, STUDENT!
YOU MAKE AN OLD MAN PROUD!
YOU FORGET, COMRADE BRUSKIN--
-- THAT I WAS YOUR PUPIL AS WELL--
--AND WHILE THE AGILITY OF THE FAMED BLACK WIDOW FAR SURPASSES MY OWN-
--DARKSTAR HAS OTHER POWERS AT HER COMMAND!
POWER SUCH AS--
--THIS!
ALEXEI! SOME KIND OF FORCE COMING FROM HER HAND!
LEAVE ME, CHILD!
SAVE YOURSELF!


I WOULD BE UNTRUE TO YOUR TEACHING WERE I TO DO THAT, ALEXI BRUSKIN!
AND I WOULD BE UNTRUE TO THAT SAME TEACHING WERE I TO ACT ANY DIFFERENTLY, MADAM WIDOW!
THOUGH I CANNOT SAY WHICH OF US IS RIGHT!
ZAP!
NOTHING! EVEN THOUGH I RECOVERED MY WIDOW'S-BITE--IT HAS NO EFFECT!
NATASHA! ABOVE YOU! ON THE SKYLIGHT!!
HAVE YOU SO SOON FORGOTTEN ME, OLD ONE?
SKRASH
IVAN!!
SAME AS EVER, ALEXEI! BUT WE'LL CHAT AFTER MY TRANQUILLIZER-BULLETS HAVE TAKEN CARE OF YOUR JAILER!
TO DO THAT THEY FIRST MUST HIT ME, IVAN PETROVITCH!
AND THAT THEY SHALL NOT DO!
I TRAINED HER, IVAN! SHE IS FAST!


AH, BUT CAN SHE SEE IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE?
HOW'VE YOU BEEN, 'TASHA?
FINE, OLD FRIEND!
UNHH!
STOOM!
JUST FINE!
LAYNIA!
CHILD! ARE YOU--?
I AM... ALL RIGHT, TEACHER.
SAVE FOR ...MY DIGNITY!
THAT AIN'T THE ONLY SPOT THAT'S GONNA BE HURTIN', LITTLE GIRL!
NOW SUPPOSE YOU TELL ME WHERE THE OTHERS ARE BEFORE...
UNHAND HER, TRAITOR!
WHO IN BLAZES?!


IT IS THE "OTHERS" WHOM YOU SOUGHT, IVAN PETROVICH!
THEY ARE HERE!
STAND WHERE YA ARE, WIDOW --OR THE CHAMPS GET IT!
WHO ARE YOU? THE REAL CRIMSON DYNAMO IS DEAD?
WHAT DO YOU WANT OF US?
NOT "US," WIDOW! JUST YOU, IVAN-- AND THE OLD MAN!
THE STATE HAS ITS REASONS FOR WANTING YOU AND THE COMMISSAR--
--AND I HAVE MINE FOR WANTING IVAN PETROVITCH!
I AM CALLED THE CRIMSON DYNAMO NOW --BUT I HAVE BORNE OTHER NAMES!
ONE OF WHICH WAS... THE OUTCAST!
NO! IT CAN'T BE!
THEY TOLD ME YOU WERE DEAD!
WHO IS HE, IVAN? HOW DO YOU KNOW HIM?
AS A FATHER KNOWS HIS SON, MADAM NATASHA!
I AM YURI PETROVITCH!
NEXT: IN FINAL BATTLE!

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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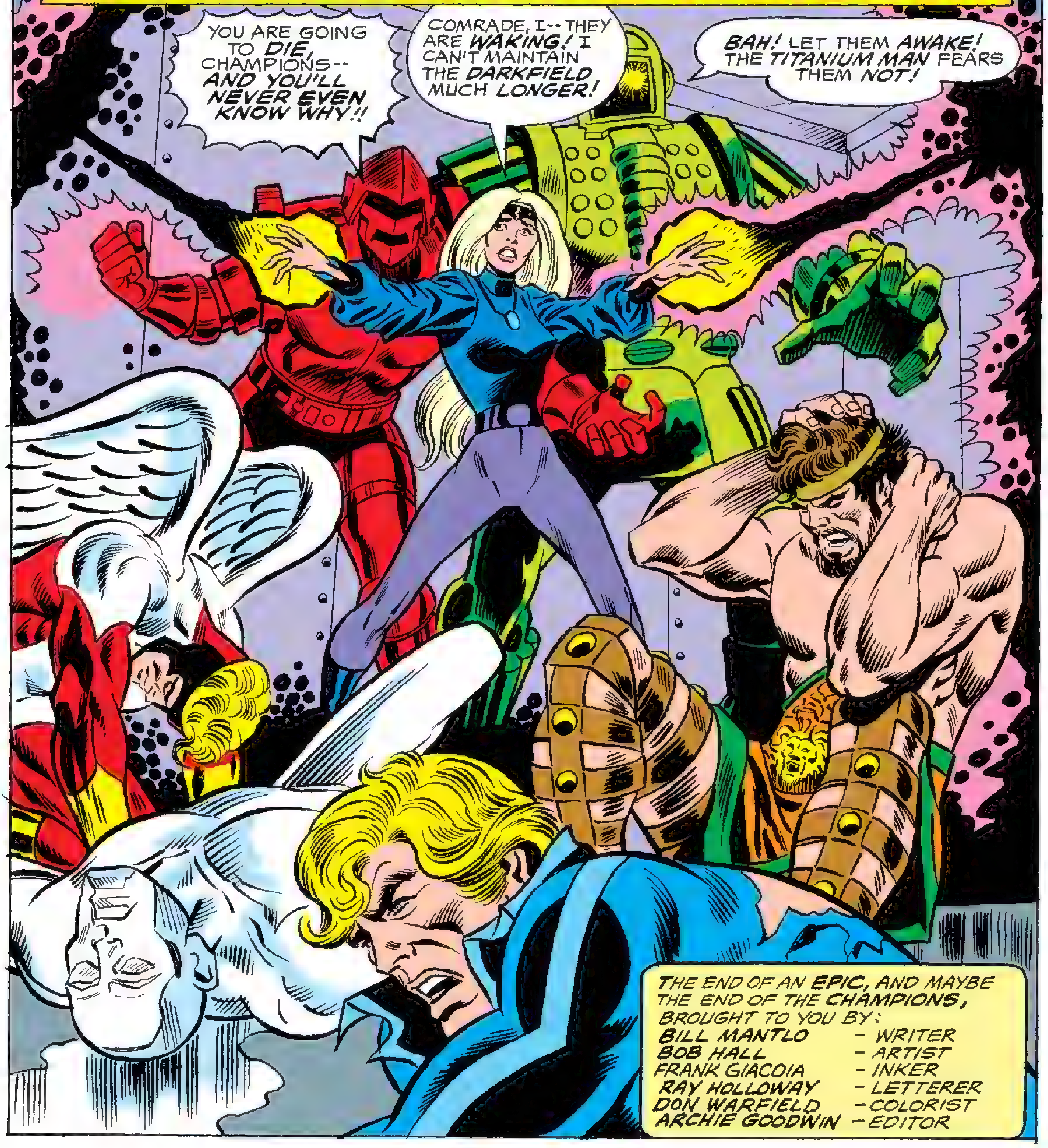
HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
TM
TM
ASIDE, SATAN-SPAWN! THE SONS OF ZEUS MUST BREAK FREE!
BACK, HERCULES! YOU'LL FEEL THE FULL FURY OF HELL--
--BEFORE I LET YOU ESCAPE THIS ROOM!
COCKRUM
CHAMPION VS. CHAMPION!
THE DEMON AND THE DEMI-GOD!

The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

Stan Lee PRESENTS:

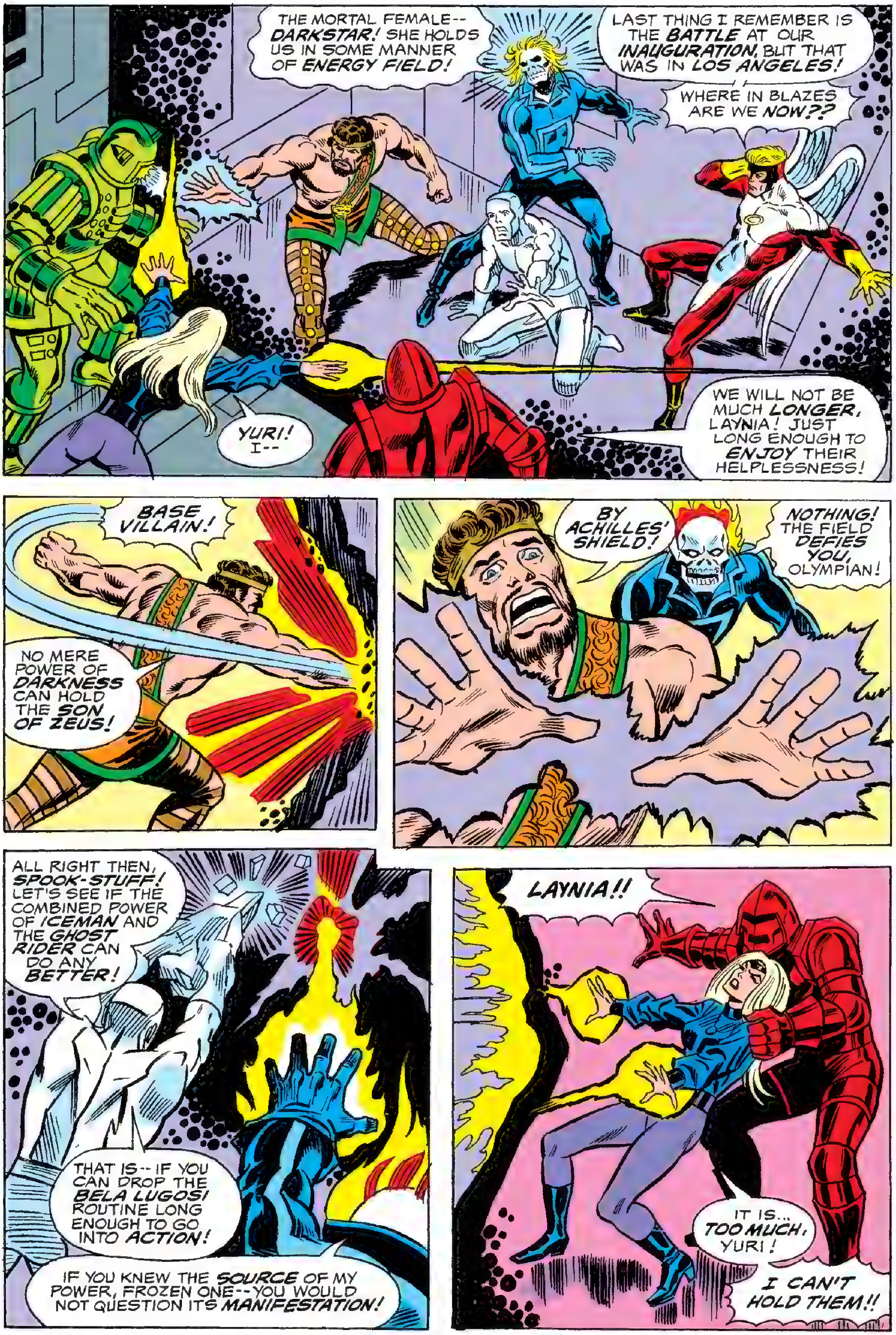
THE CHAMPIONS™

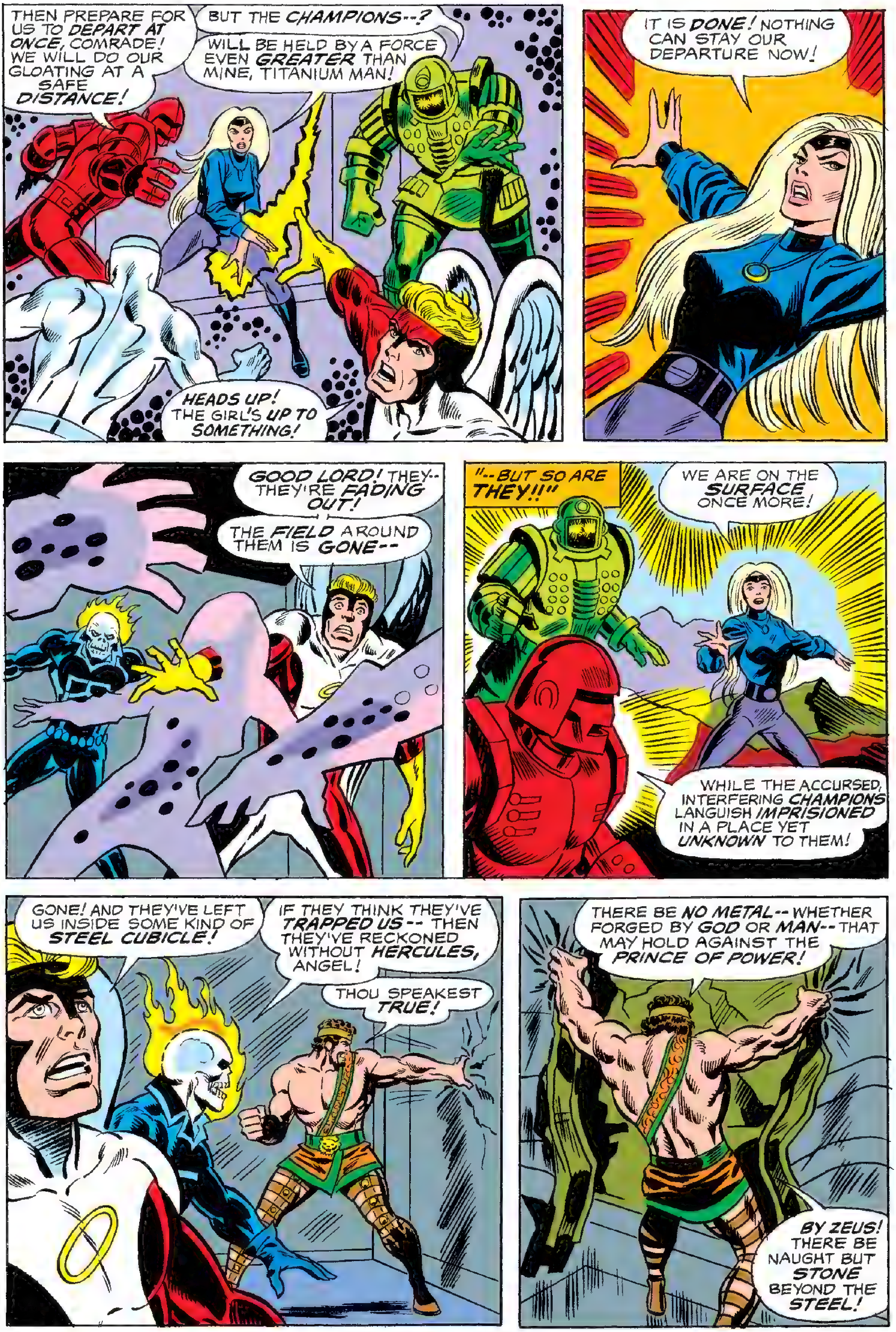
ONE MAN'S SON IS ANOTHER MAN'S POISON!

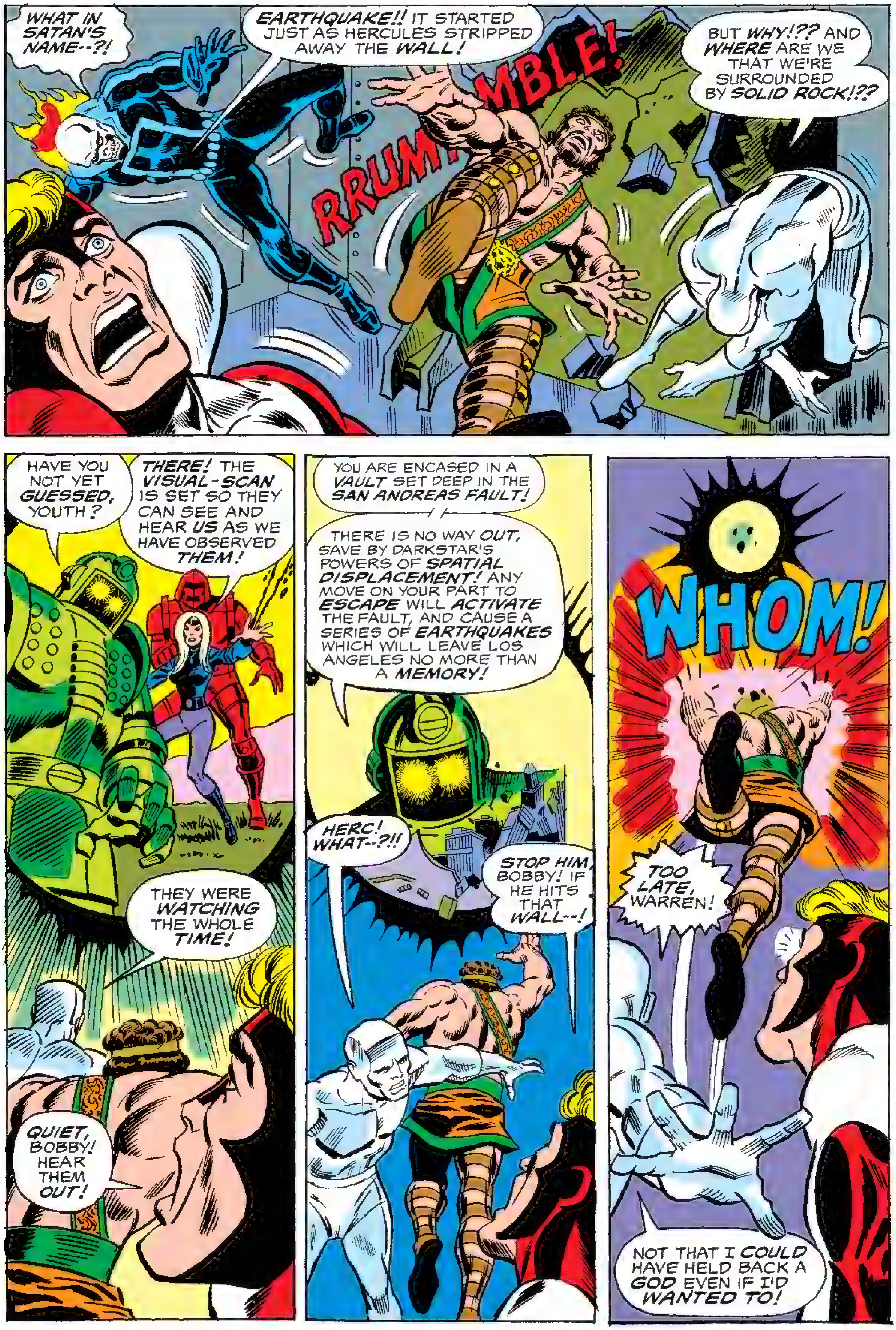

YOU ARE GOING TO *DIE*, CHAMPIONS-- *AND YOU'LL NEVER EVEN KNOW WHY!!*
COMRADE, I--THEY ARE *WAKING!* I CAN'T MAINTAIN THE *DARKFIELD* MUCH *LONGER!*
BAH! LET THEM *AWAKE!* THE *TITANIUM MAN* FEARS THEM *NOT!*

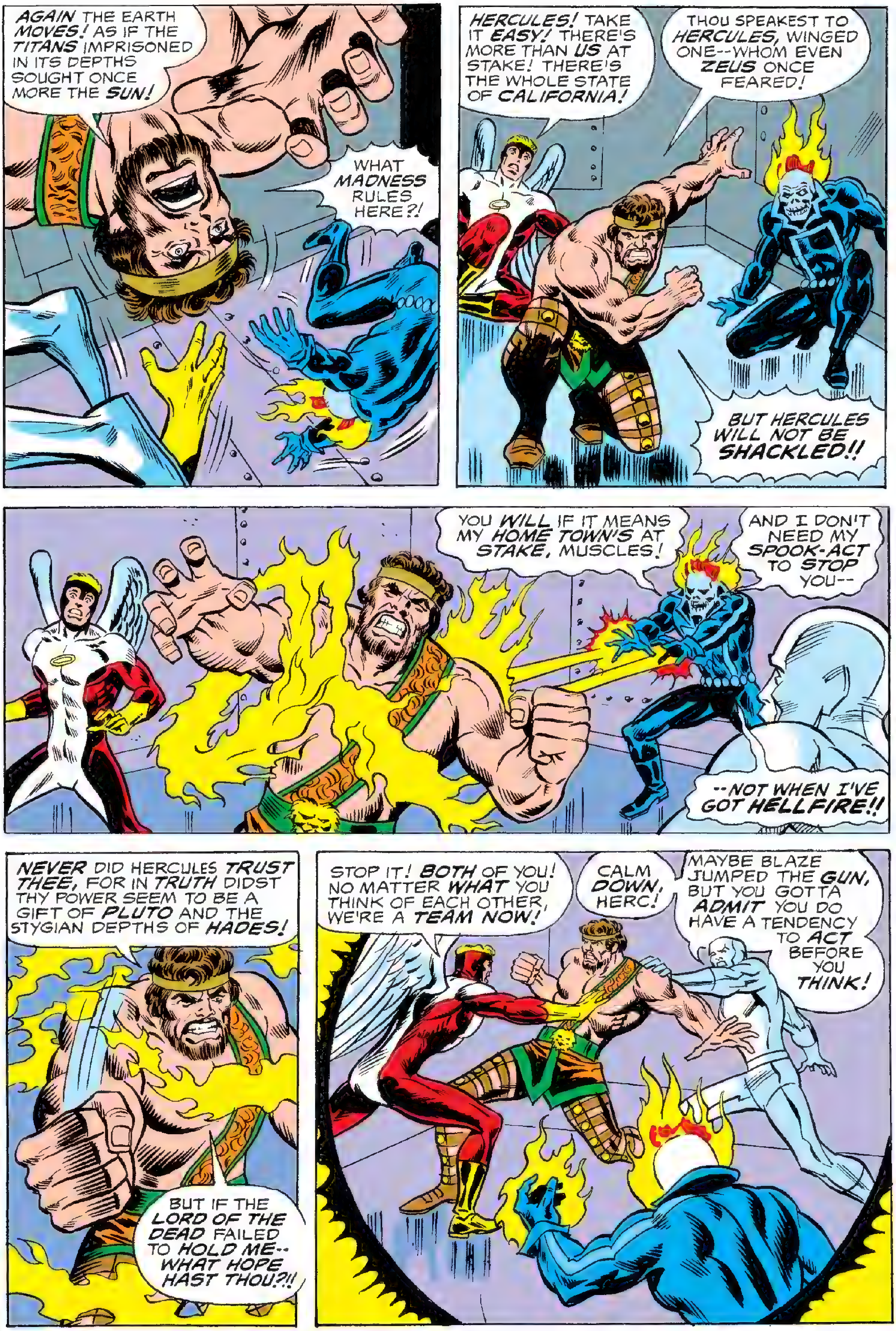
*THE END OF AN **EPIC**, AND MAYBE THE END OF THE **CHAMPIONS**, BROUGHT TO YOU BY:*

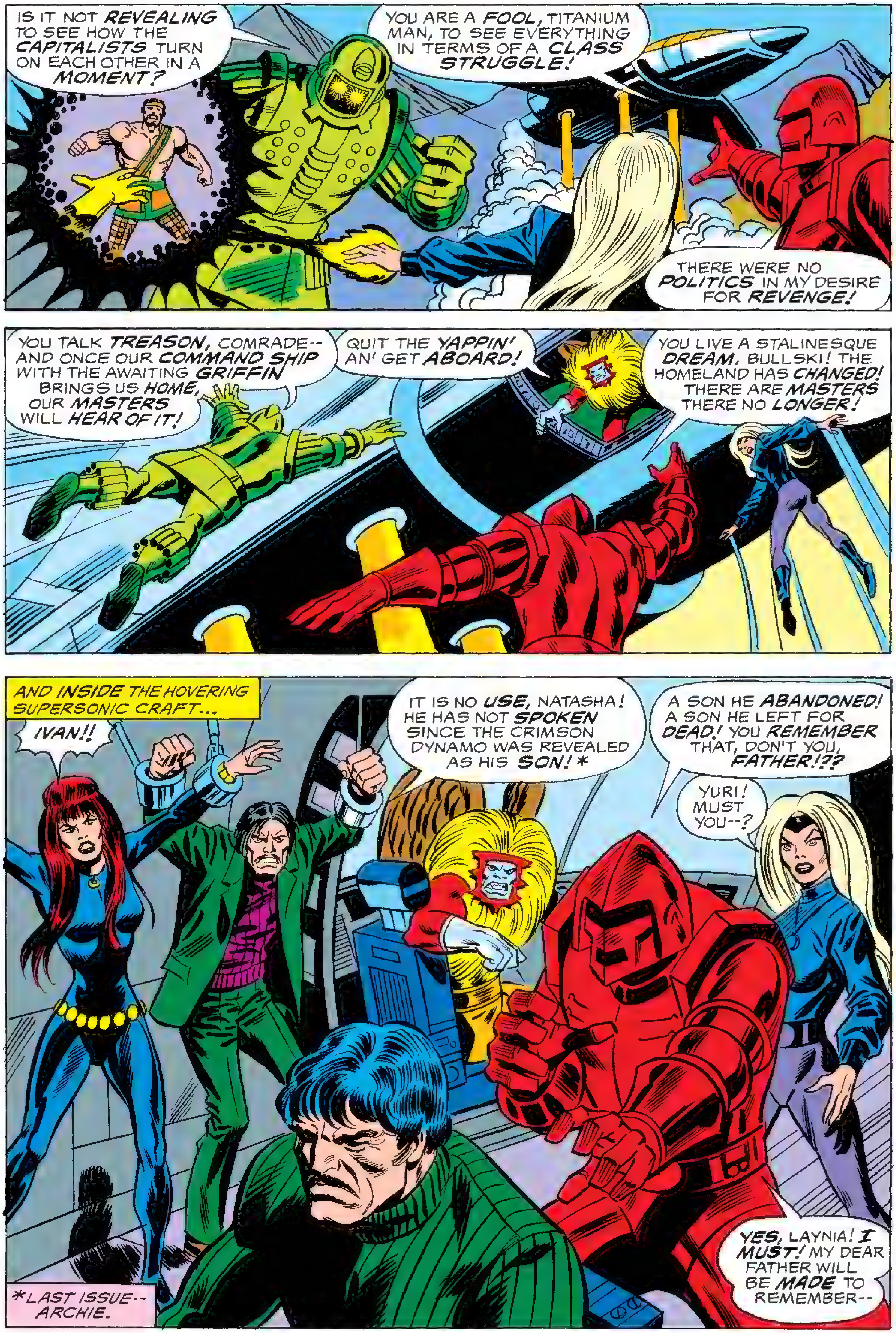
BILL MANTLO *- WRITER*
BOB HALL *- ARTIST*
FRANK GIACOIA *- INKER*
RAY HOLLOWAY *- LETTERER*
DON WARFIELD *- COLORIST*
ARCHIE GOODWIN *- EDITOR*

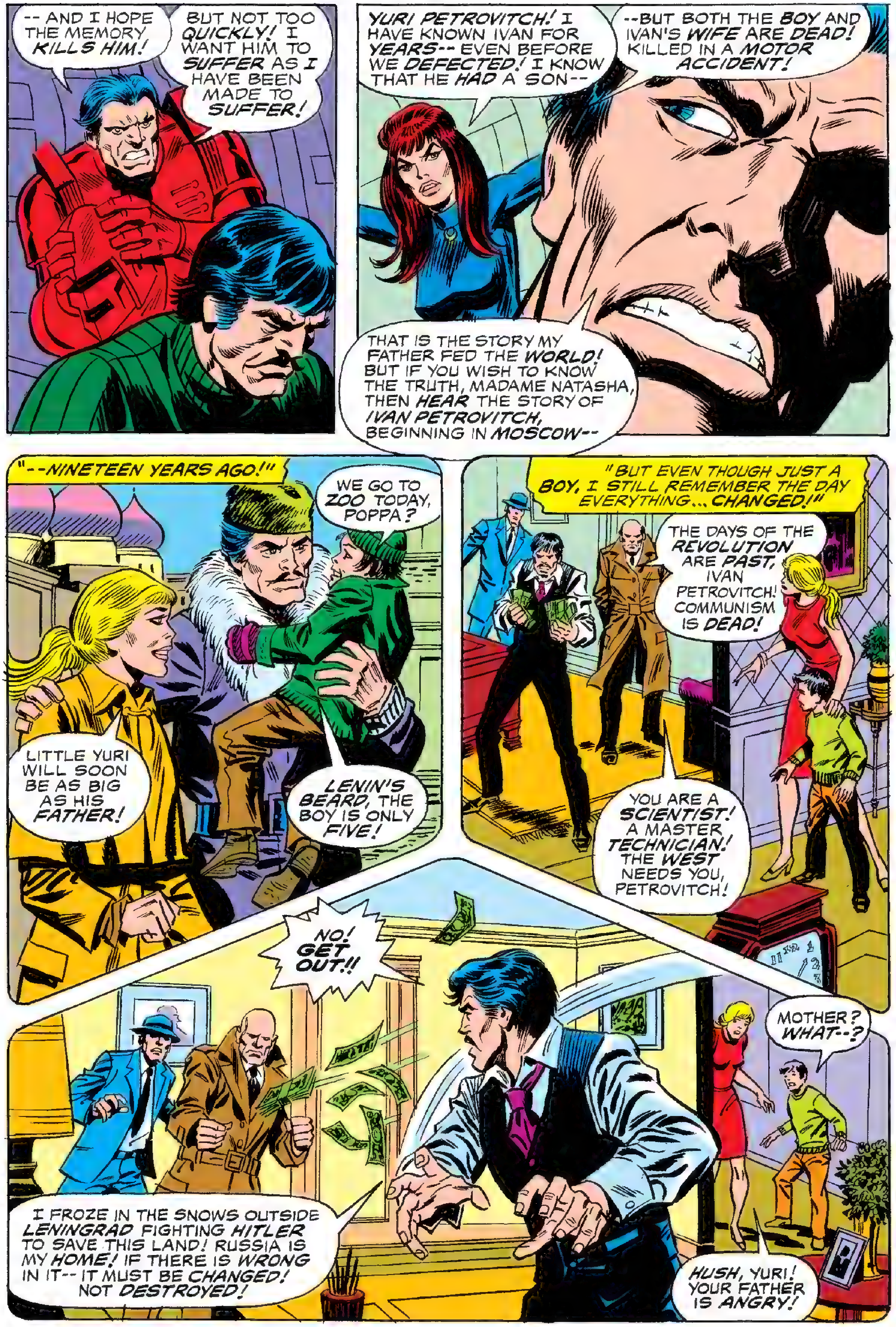

THE MORTAL FEMALE-- DARKSTAR! SHE HOLDS US IN SOME MANNER OF ENERGY FIELD!
LAST THING I REMEMBER IS THE BATTLE AT OUR INAUGURATION, BUT THAT WAS IN LOS ANGELES!
WHERE IN BLAZES ARE WE NOW??
YURI! I--
WE WILL NOT BE MUCH LONGER, LAYNIA! JUST LONG ENOUGH TO ENJOY THEIR HELPLESSNESS!
BASE VILLAIN!
NO MERE POWER OF DARKNESS CAN HOLD THE SON OF ZEUS!
BY ACHILLES' SHIELD!
NOTHING! THE FIELD DEFIES YOU, OLYMPIAN!
ALL RIGHT THEN, SPOOK-STUFF! LET'S SEE IF THE COMBINED POWER OF ICEMAN AND THE GHOST RIDER CAN DO ANY BETTER!
THAT IS-- IF YOU CAN DROP THE BELA LUGOSI ROUTINE LONG ENOUGH TO GO INTO ACTION!
IF YOU KNEW THE SOURCE OF MY POWER, FROZEN ONE--YOU WOULD NOT QUESTION ITS MANIFESTATION!
LAYNIA!!
IT IS... TOO MUCH, YURI!
I CAN'T HOLD THEM!!

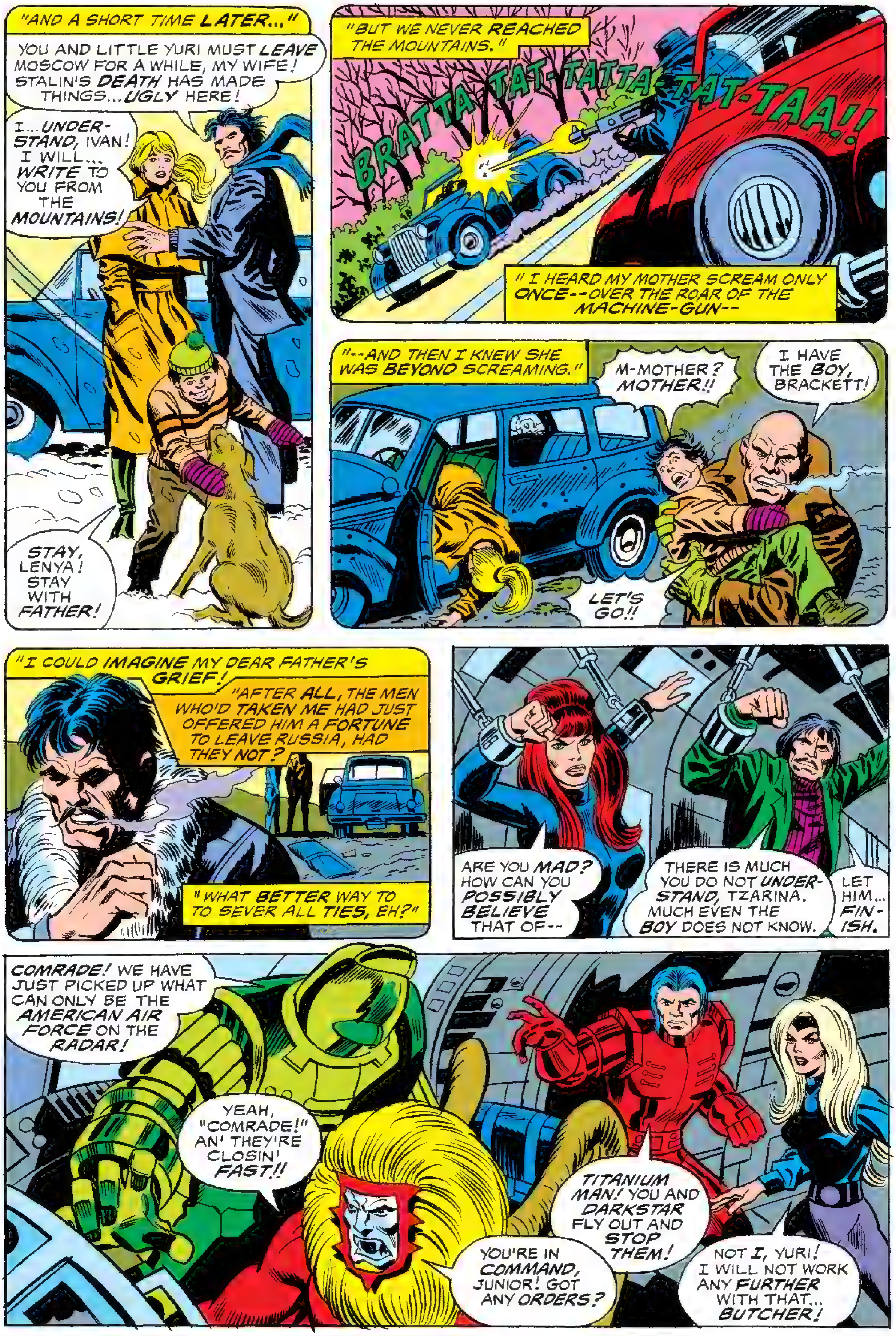

THEN PREPARE FOR US TO DEPART AT ONCE, COMRADE! WE WILL DO OUR GLOATING AT A SAFE DISTANCE!
BUT THE CHAMPIONS--?
WILL BE HELD BY A FORCE EVEN GREATER THAN MINE, TITANIUM MAN!
HEADS UP! THE GIRL'S UP TO SOMETHING!
IT IS DONE! NOTHING CAN STAY OUR DEPARTURE NOW!
GOOD LORD! THEY-- THEY'RE FADING OUT!
THE FIELD AROUND THEM IS GONE--
"--BUT SO ARE THEY!!"
WE ARE ON THE SURFACE ONCE MORE!
WHILE THE ACCURSED, INTERFERING CHAMPIONS LANGUISH IMPRISIONED IN A PLACE YET UNKNOWN TO THEM!
GONE! AND THEY'VE LEFT US INSIDE SOME KIND OF STEEL CUBICLE!
IF THEY THINK THEY'VE TRAPPED US -- THEN THEY'VE RECKONED WITHOUT HERCULES, ANGEL!
THOU SPEAKEST TRUE!
THERE BE NO METAL -- WHETHER FORGED BY GOD OR MAN -- THAT MAY HOLD AGAINST THE PRINCE OF POWER!
BY ZEUS! THERE BE NAUGHT BUT STONE BEYOND THE STEEL!

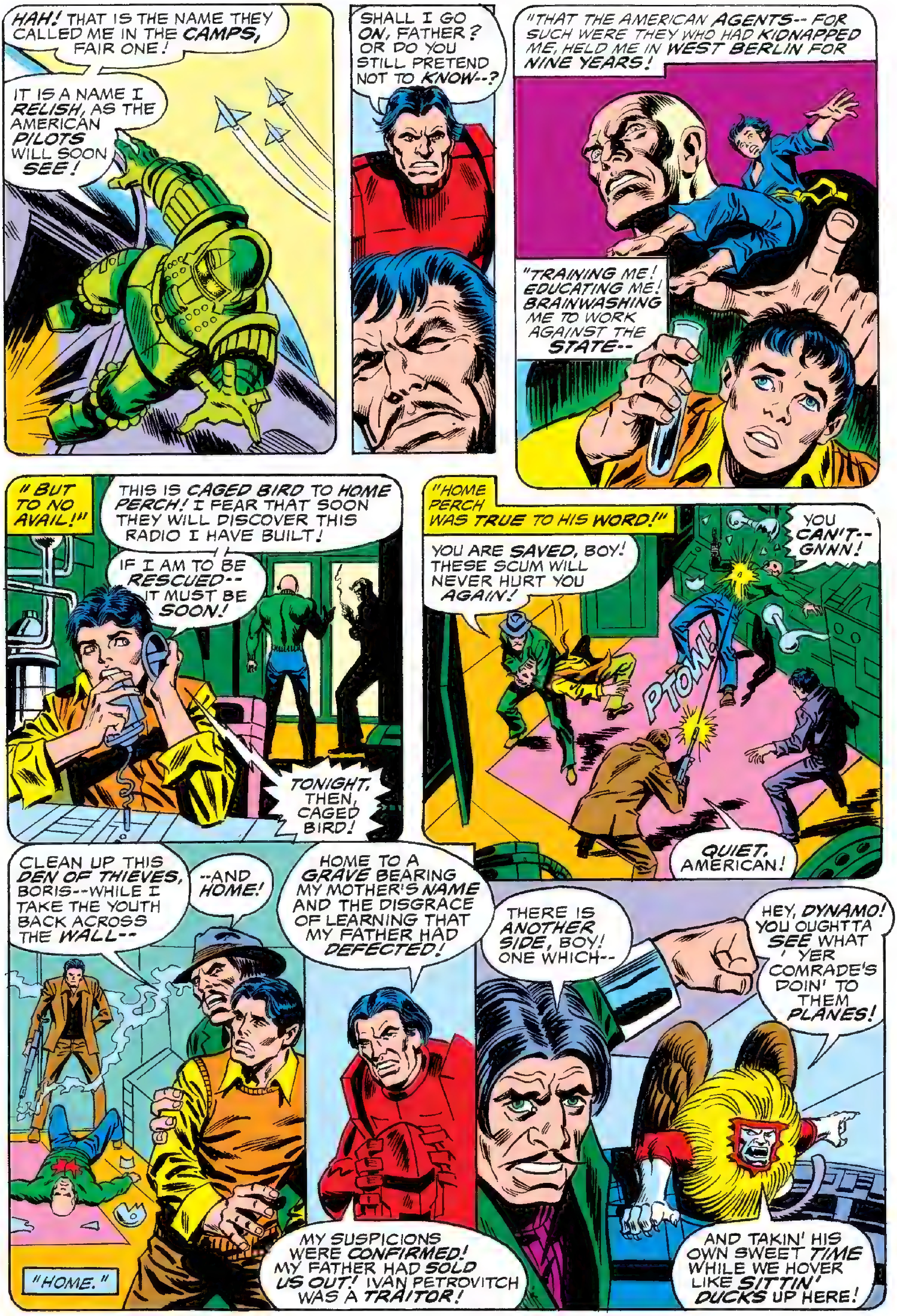

WHAT IN SATAN'S NAME--?!
EARTHQUAKE!! IT STARTED JUST AS HERCULES STRIPPED AWAY THE WALL!
RRUMMMBLE!
BUT WHY!?? AND WHERE ARE WE THAT WE'RE SURROUNDED BY SOLID ROCK!??
HAVE YOU NOT YET GUESSED, YOUTH?
THERE! THE VISUAL-SCAN IS SET SO THEY CAN SEE AND HEAR US AS WE HAVE OBSERVED THEM!
THEY WERE WATCHING THE WHOLE TIME!
QUIET, BOBBY! HEAR THEM OUT!
YOU ARE ENCASED IN A VAULT SET DEEP IN THE SAN ANDREAS FAULT!
THERE IS NO WAY OUT, SAVE BY DARKSTAR'S POWERS OF SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT! ANY MOVE ON YOUR PART TO ESCAPE WILL ACTIVATE THE FAULT, AND CAUSE A SERIES OF EARTHQUAKES WHICH WILL LEAVE LOS ANGELES NO MORE THAN A MEMORY!
HERC! WHAT--?!!
STOP HIM, BOBBY! IF HE HITS THAT WALL--!
WHOM!
TOO LATE, WARREN!
NOT THAT I COULD HAVE HELD BACK A GOD EVEN IF I'D WANTED TO!

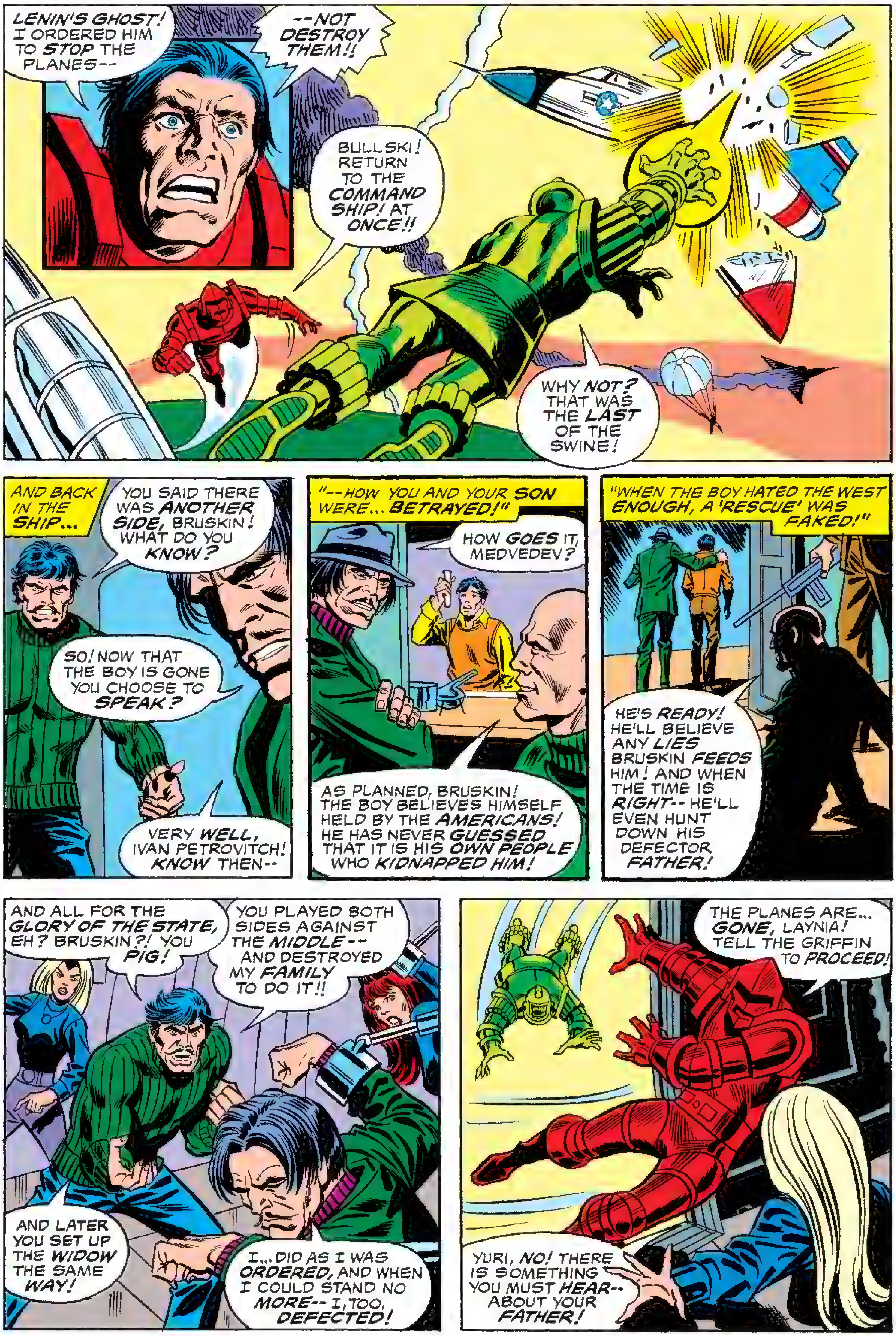

AGAIN THE EARTH MOVES! AS IF THE TITANS IMPRISONED IN ITS DEPTHS SOUGHT ONCE MORE THE SUN!
WHAT MADNESS RULES HERE?!
HERCULES! TAKE IT EASY! THERE'S MORE THAN US AT STAKE! THERE'S THE WHOLE STATE OF CALIFORNIA!
THOU SPEAKEST TO HERCULES, WINGED ONE--WHOM EVEN ZEUS ONCE FEARED!
BUT HERCULES WILL NOT BE SHACKLED!!
YOU WILL IF IT MEANS MY HOME TOWN'S AT STAKE, MUSCLES!
AND I DON'T NEED MY SPOOK-ACT TO STOP YOU--
--NOT WHEN I'VE GOT HELLFIRE!!
NEVER DID HERCULES TRUST THEE, FOR IN TRUTH DIDST THY POWER SEEM TO BE A GIFT OF PLUTO AND THE STYGIAN DEPTHS OF HADES!
BUT IF THE LORD OF THE DEAD FAILED TO HOLD ME-- WHAT HOPE HAST THOU?!!
STOP IT! BOTH OF YOU! NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK OF EACH OTHER, WE'RE A TEAM NOW!
CALM DOWN, HERC!
MAYBE BLAZE JUMPED THE GUN, BUT YOU GOTTA ADMIT YOU DO HAVE A TENDENCY TO ACT BEFORE YOU THINK!

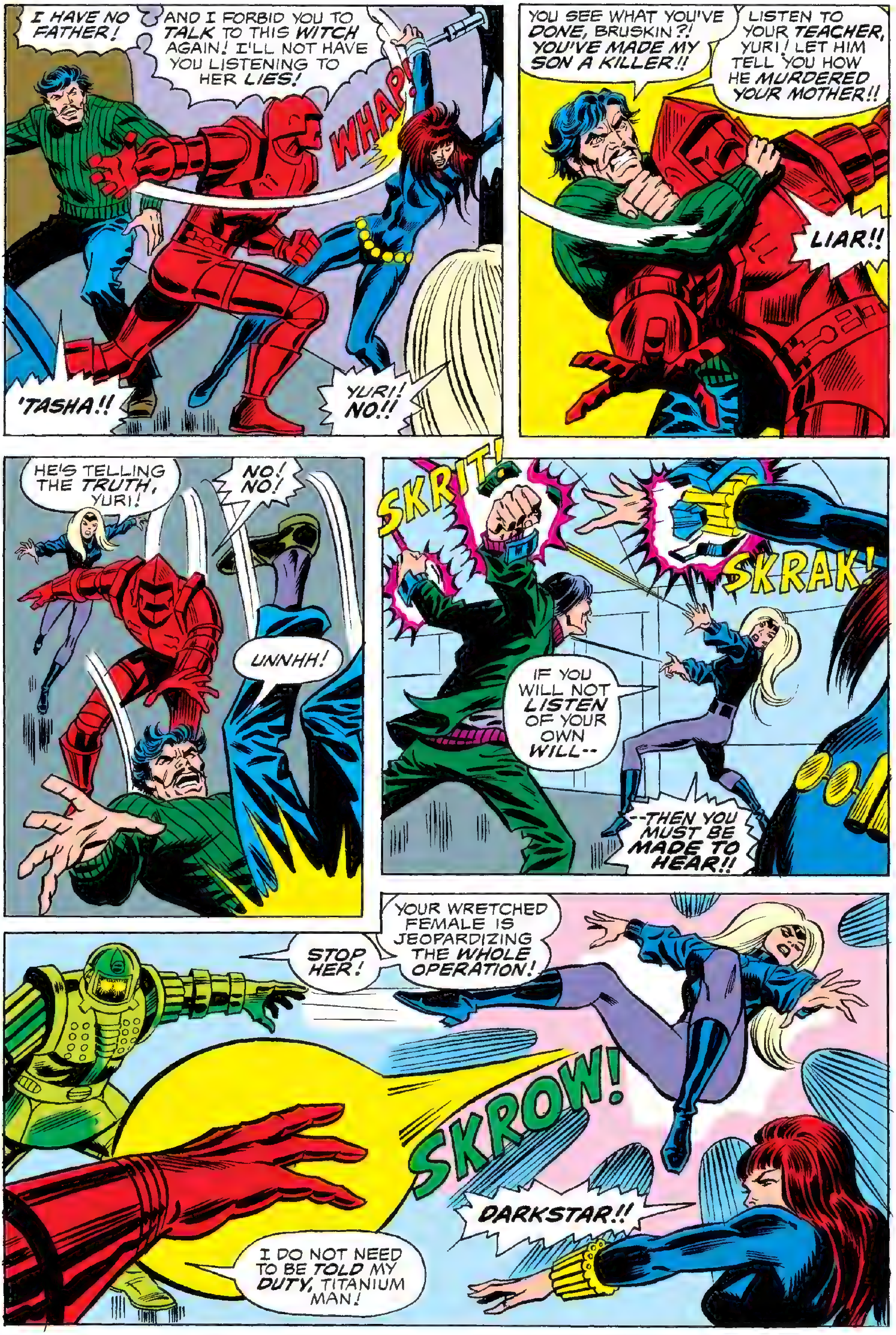

IS IT NOT REVEALING TO SEE HOW THE CAPITALISTS TURN ON EACH OTHER IN A MOMENT?
YOU ARE A FOOL, TITANIUM MAN, TO SEE EVERYTHING IN TERMS OF A CLASS STRUGGLE!
THERE WERE NO POLITICS IN MY DESIRE FOR REVENGE!
YOU TALK TREASON, COMRADE-- AND ONCE OUR COMMAND SHIP WITH THE AWAITING GRIFFIN BRINGS US HOME, OUR MASTERS WILL HEAR OF IT!
QUIT THE YAPPIN' AN' GET ABOARD!
YOU LIVE A STALINESQUE DREAM, BULLSKI! THE HOMELAND HAS CHANGED! THERE ARE MASTERS THERE NO LONGER!
AND INSIDE THE HOVERING SUPERSONIC CRAFT...
IVAN!!
IT IS NO USE, NATASHA! HE HAS NOT SPOKEN SINCE THE CRIMSON DYNAMO WAS REVEALED AS HIS SON! *
A SON HE ABANDONED! A SON HE LEFT FOR DEAD! YOU REMEMBER THAT, DON'T YOU, FATHER!??
YURI! MUST YOU--?
YES, LAYNIA! I MUST! MY DEAR FATHER WILL BE MADE TO REMEMBER--
*LAST ISSUE-- ARCHIE.

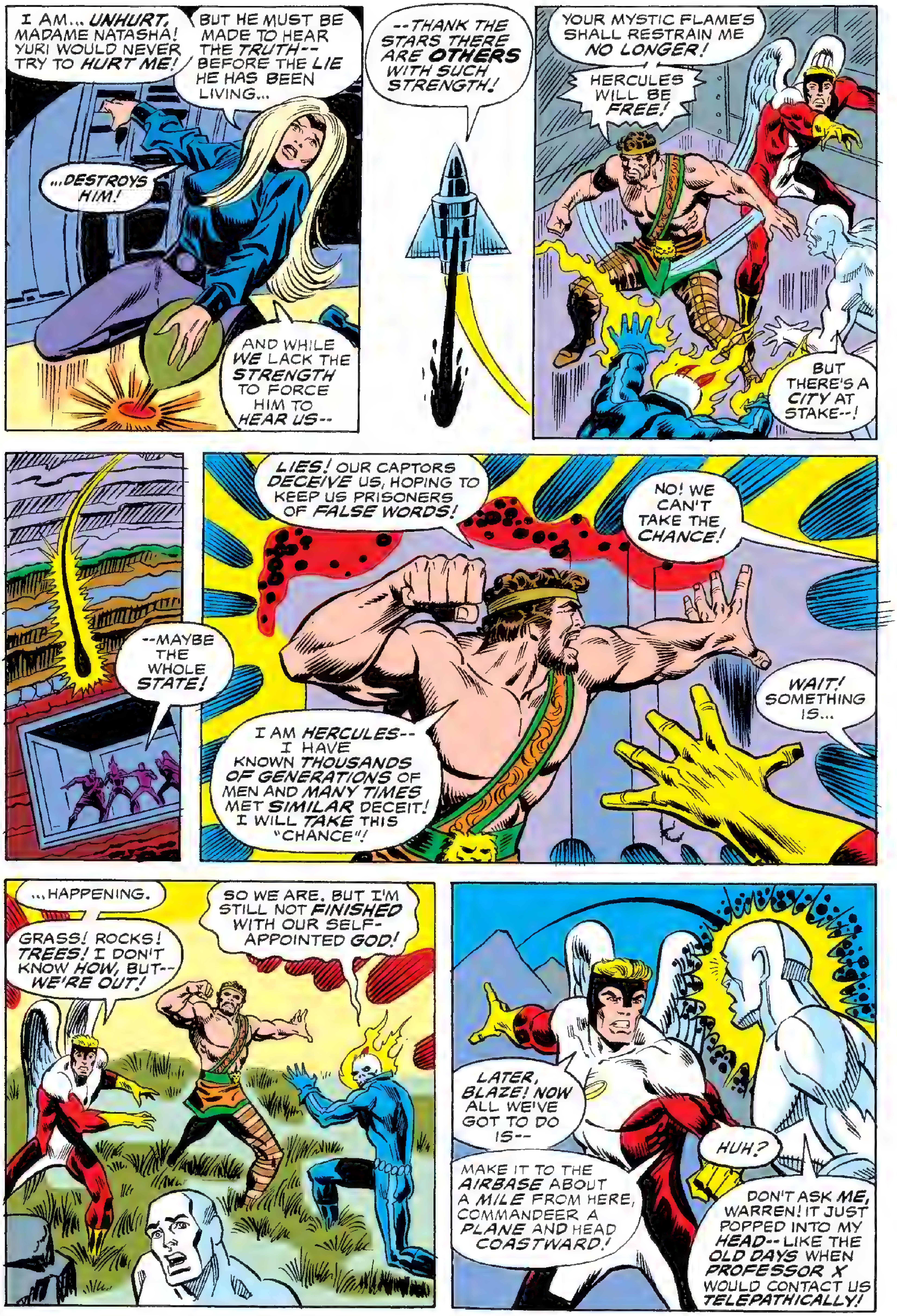

-- AND I HOPE THE MEMORY *KILLS HIM!*
BUT NOT TOO *QUICKLY!* I WANT HIM TO *SUFFER* AS I HAVE BEEN MADE TO *SUFFER!*
YURI PETROVITCH! I HAVE KNOWN IVAN FOR *YEARS--* EVEN BEFORE WE *DEFECTED!* I KNOW THAT HE *HAD* A SON--
--BUT BOTH THE *BOY* AND IVAN'S *WIFE* ARE *DEAD!* KILLED IN A *MOTOR ACCIDENT!*
THAT IS THE STORY MY FATHER FED THE *WORLD!* BUT IF YOU WISH TO KNOW THE TRUTH, MADAME NATASHA, THEN *HEAR* THE STORY OF *IVAN PETROVITCH,* BEGINNING IN *MOSCOW--*
"*--NINETEEN YEARS AGO!*"
WE GO TO *ZOO* TODAY, POPPA?
LITTLE YURI WILL SOON BE AS BIG AS HIS *FATHER!*
LENIN'S BEARD, THE BOY IS ONLY *FIVE!*
"*BUT EVEN THOUGH JUST A BOY, I STILL REMEMBER THE DAY EVERYTHING... CHANGED!*"
THE DAYS OF THE *REVOLUTION* ARE *PAST,* IVAN PETROVITCH! COMMUNISM IS *DEAD!*
YOU ARE A *SCIENTIST!* A MASTER *TECHNICIAN!* THE *WEST* NEEDS YOU, PETROVITCH!
NO! GET OUT!!
MOTHER? *WHAT--?*
I FROZE IN THE SNOWS OUTSIDE *LENINGRAD* FIGHTING *HITLER* TO SAVE THIS LAND! RUSSIA IS MY *HOME!* IF THERE IS *WRONG* IN IT-- IT MUST BE *CHANGED!* NOT *DESTROYED!*
HUSH, YURI! YOUR FATHER IS *ANGRY!*

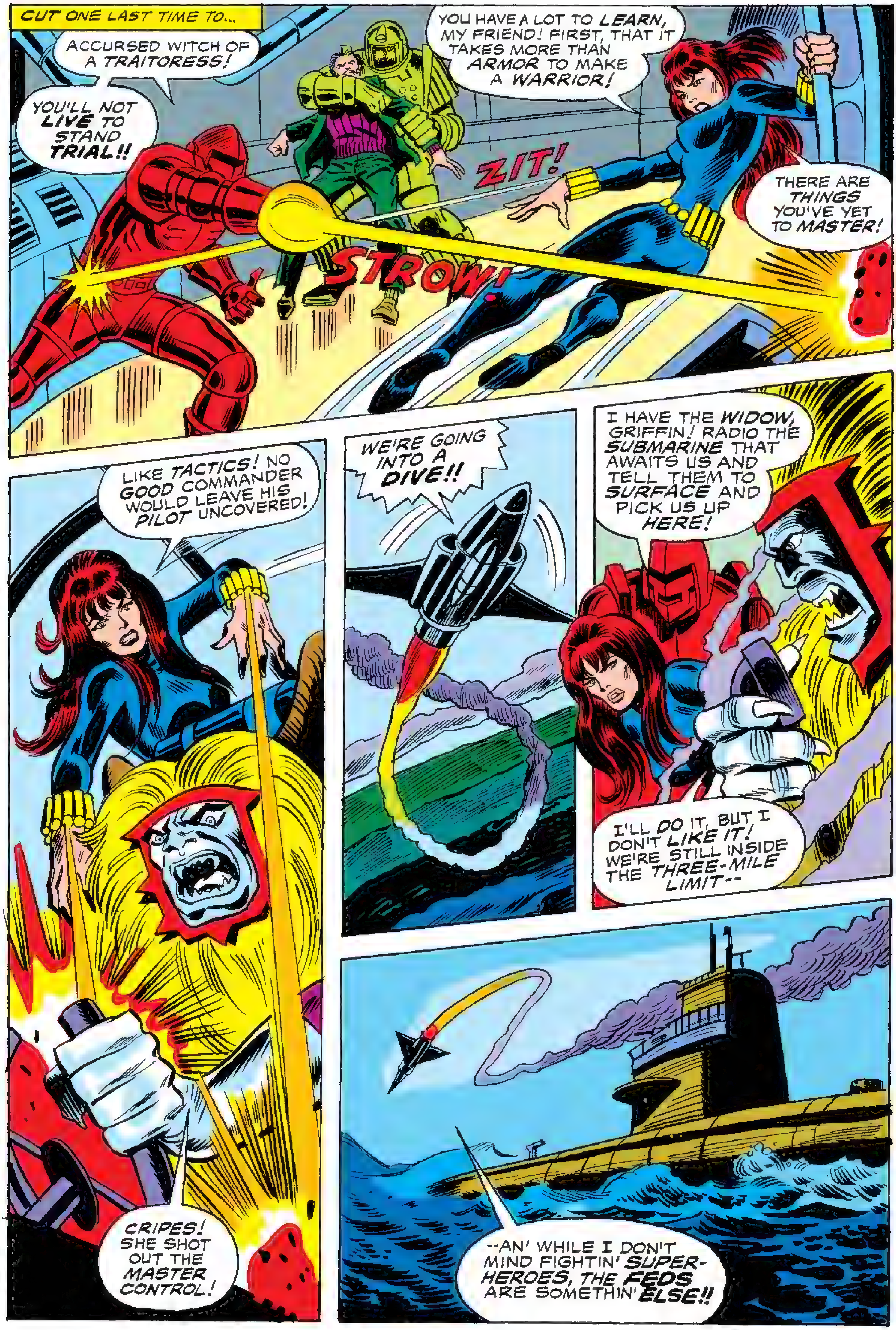

"AND A SHORT TIME LATER..."
YOU AND LITTLE YURI MUST LEAVE MOSCOW FOR A WHILE, MY WIFE! STALIN'S DEATH HAS MADE THINGS...UGLY HERE!
I...UNDERSTAND, IVAN! I WILL... WRITE TO YOU FROM THE MOUNTAINS!
STAY, LENYA! STAY WITH FATHER!
"BUT WE NEVER REACHED THE MOUNTAINS."
BRATTA TAT-TATTA-TAT-TAA!!
"I HEARD MY MOTHER SCREAM ONLY ONCE--OVER THE ROAR OF THE MACHINE-GUN--
"--AND THEN I KNEW SHE WAS BEYOND SCREAMING."
M-MOTHER? MOTHER!!
I HAVE THE BOY, BRACKETT!
LET'S GO!!
"I COULD IMAGINE MY DEAR FATHER'S GRIEF!
"AFTER ALL, THE MEN WHO'D TAKEN ME HAD JUST OFFERED HIM A FORTUNE TO LEAVE RUSSIA, HAD THEY NOT?
"WHAT BETTER WAY TO TO SEVER ALL TIES, EH?"
ARE YOU MAD? HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY BELIEVE THAT OF--
THERE IS MUCH YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND, TZARINA. MUCH EVEN THE BOY DOES NOT KNOW.
LET HIM... FINISH.
COMRADE! WE HAVE JUST PICKED UP WHAT CAN ONLY BE THE AMERICAN AIR FORCE ON THE RADAR!
YEAH, "COMRADE!" AN' THEY'RE CLOSIN' FAST!!
YOU'RE IN COMMAND, JUNIOR! GOT ANY ORDERS?
TITANIUM MAN! YOU AND DARKSTAR FLY OUT AND STOP THEM!
NOT I, YURI! I WILL NOT WORK ANY FURTHER WITH THAT... BUTCHER!

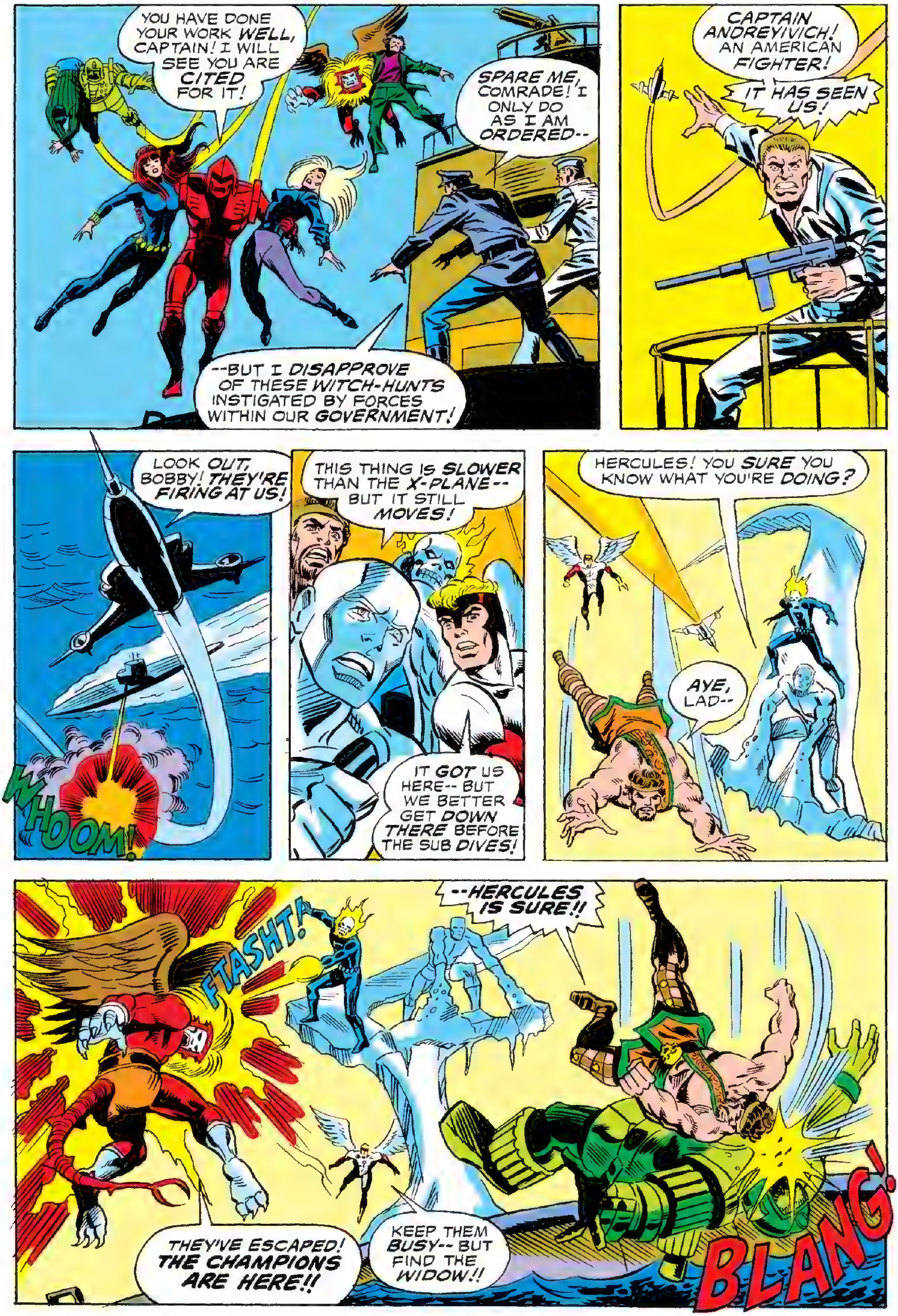

HAH! THAT IS THE NAME THEY CALLED ME IN THE CAMPS, FAIR ONE!
IT IS A NAME I RELISH, AS THE AMERICAN PILOTS WILL SOON SEE!
SHALL I GO ON, FATHER? OR DO YOU STILL PRETEND NOT TO KNOW--?
"THAT THE AMERICAN AGENTS-- FOR SUCH WERE THEY WHO HAD KIDNAPPED ME, HELD ME IN WEST BERLIN FOR NINE YEARS!
"TRAINING ME! EDUCATING ME! BRAINWASHING ME TO WORK AGAINST THE STATE--
"BUT TO NO AVAIL!"
THIS IS CAGED BIRD TO HOME PERCH! I FEAR THAT SOON THEY WILL DISCOVER THIS RADIO I HAVE BUILT!
IF I AM TO BE RESCUED-- IT MUST BE SOON!
TONIGHT, THEN, CAGED BIRD!
"HOME PERCH WAS TRUE TO HIS WORD!"
YOU ARE SAVED, BOY! THESE SCUM WILL NEVER HURT YOU AGAIN!
YOU CAN'T-- GNNN!
PTOW!
QUIET, AMERICAN!
CLEAN UP THIS DEN OF THIEVES, BORIS--WHILE I TAKE THE YOUTH BACK ACROSS THE WALL--
--AND HOME!
"HOME."
HOME TO A GRAVE BEARING MY MOTHER'S NAME AND THE DISGRACE OF LEARNING THAT MY FATHER HAD DEFECTED!
MY SUSPICIONS WERE CONFIRMED! MY FATHER HAD SOLD US OUT! IVAN PETROVITCH WAS A TRAITOR!
THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE, BOY! ONE WHICH--
HEY, DYNAMO! YOU OUGHTTA SEE WHAT YER COMRADE'S DOIN' TO THEM PLANES!
AND TAKIN' HIS OWN SWEET TIME WHILE WE HOVER LIKE SITTIN' DUCKS UP HERE!

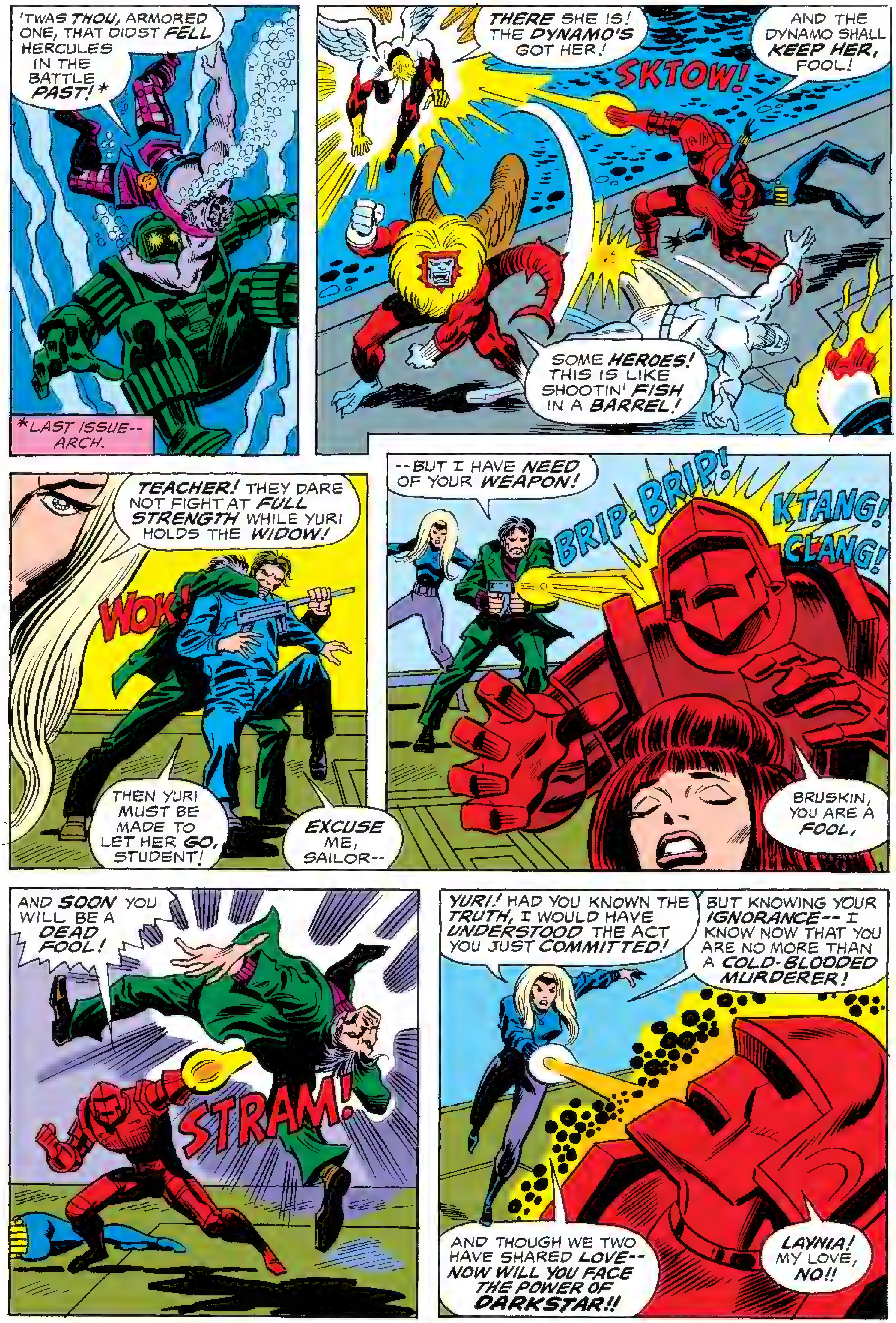

LENIN'S GHOST! I ORDERED HIM TO STOP THE PLANES--
--NOT DESTROY THEM!!
BULLSKI! RETURN TO THE COMMAND SHIP! AT ONCE!!
WHY NOT? THAT WAS THE LAST OF THE SWINE!
AND BACK IN THE SHIP...
YOU SAID THERE WAS ANOTHER SIDE, BRUSKIN! WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
SO! NOW THAT THE BOY IS GONE YOU CHOOSE TO SPEAK?
VERY WELL, IVAN PETROVITCH! KNOW THEN--
"--HOW YOU AND YOUR SON WERE... BETRAYED!"
HOW GOES IT, MEDVEDEV?
AS PLANNED, BRUSKIN! THE BOY BELIEVES HIMSELF HELD BY THE AMERICANS! HE HAS NEVER GUESSED THAT IT IS HIS OWN PEOPLE WHO KIDNAPPED HIM!
"WHEN THE BOY HATED THE WEST ENOUGH, A 'RESCUE' WAS FAKED!"
HE'S READY! HE'LL BELIEVE ANY LIES BRUSKIN FEEDS HIM! AND WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT-- HE'LL EVEN HUNT DOWN HIS DEFECTOR FATHER!
AND ALL FOR THE GLORY OF THE STATE, EH? BRUSKIN?! YOU PIG!
YOU PLAYED BOTH SIDES AGAINST THE MIDDLE -- AND DESTROYED MY FAMILY TO DO IT!!
AND LATER YOU SET UP THE WIDOW THE SAME WAY!
I... DID AS I WAS ORDERED, AND WHEN I COULD STAND NO MORE-- I, TOO, DEFECTED!
THE PLANES ARE... GONE, LAYNIA! TELL THE GRIFFIN TO PROCEED!
YURI, NO! THERE IS SOMETHING YOU MUST HEAR-- ABOUT YOUR FATHER!

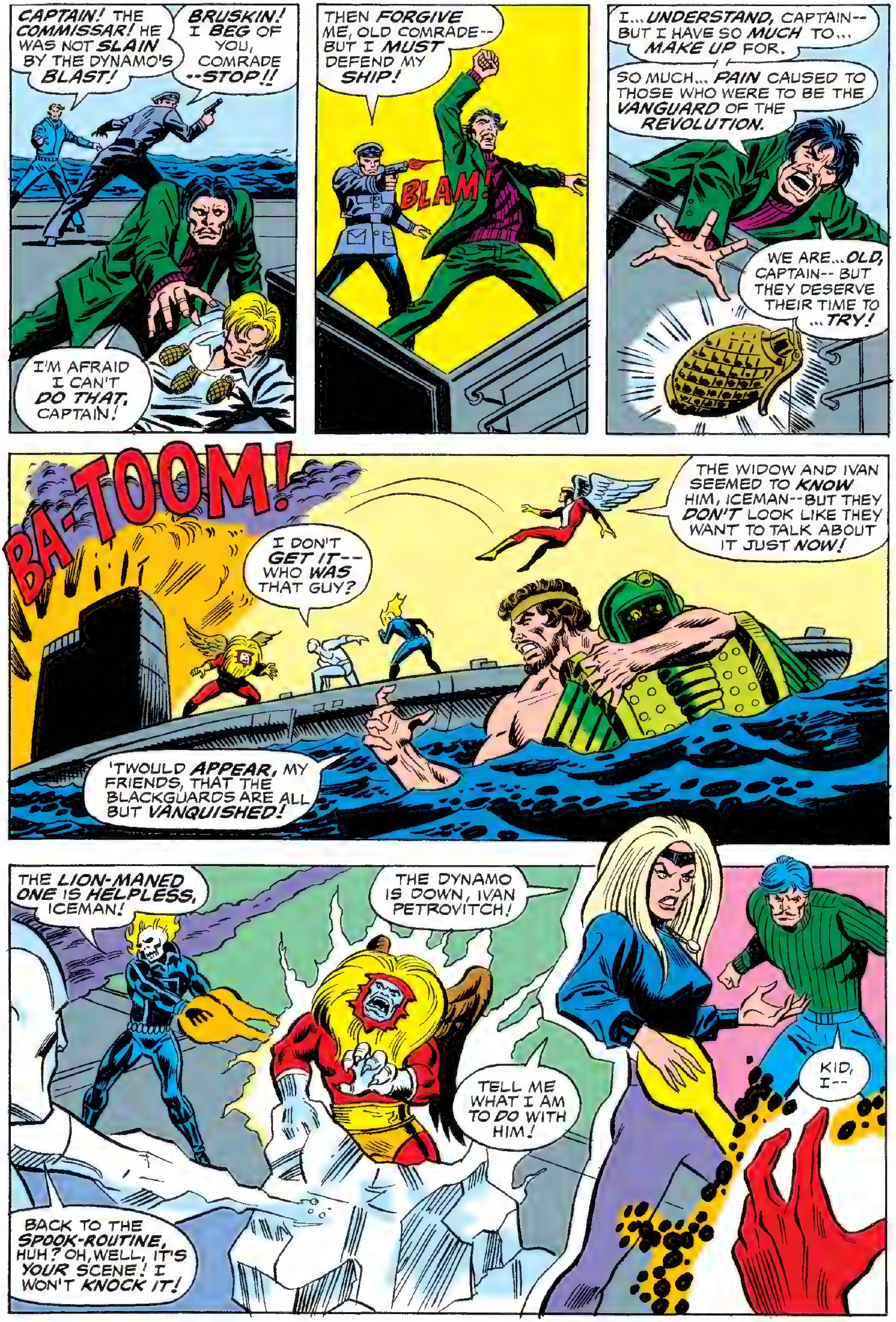

I HAVE NO FATHER!
AND I FORBID YOU TO TALK TO THIS WITCH AGAIN! I'LL NOT HAVE YOU LISTENING TO HER LIES!
WHAP!
'TASHA!!
YURI!! NO!!
YOU SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE, BRUSKIN?! YOU'VE MADE MY SON A KILLER!!
LISTEN TO YOUR TEACHER, YURI! LET HIM TELL YOU HOW HE MURDERED YOUR MOTHER!!
LIAR!!
HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH, YURI!
NO! NO!
UNNHH!
SKRIT!
SKRAK!
IF YOU WILL NOT LISTEN OF YOUR OWN WILL--
--THEN YOU MUST BE MADE TO HEAR!!
STOP HER!
YOUR WRETCHED FEMALE IS JEOPARDIZING THE WHOLE OPERATION!
SKROW!
DARKSTAR!!
I DO NOT NEED TO BE TOLD MY DUTY, TITANIUM MAN!

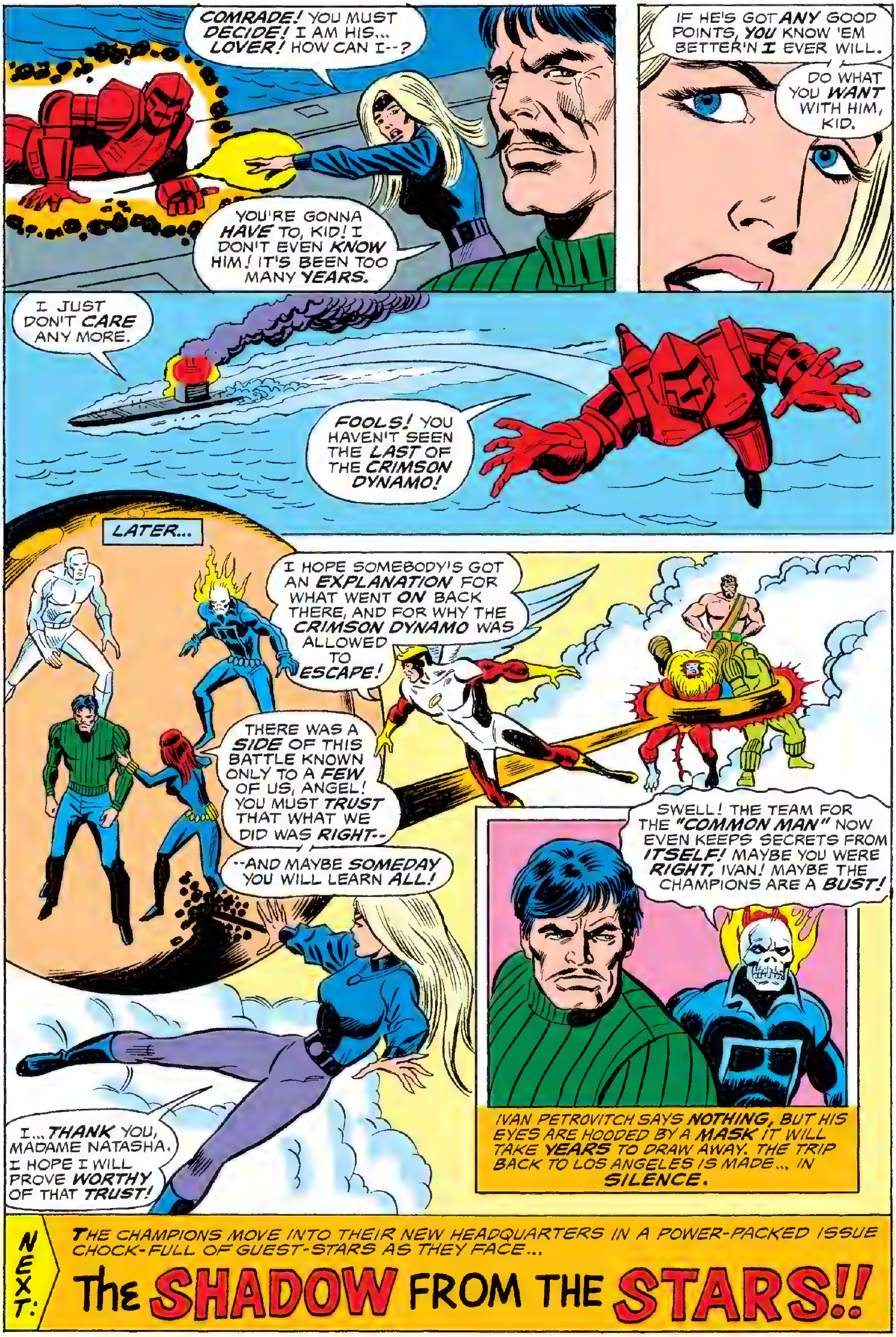

I AM... *UNHURT,* MADAME NATASHA! YURI WOULD NEVER TRY TO *HURT ME!*
BUT HE MUST BE MADE TO HEAR THE *TRUTH*-- BEFORE THE *LIE* HE HAS BEEN LIVING...
...*DESTROYS HIM!*
AND WHILE *WE* LACK THE *STRENGTH* TO FORCE HIM TO *HEAR US*--
--*THANK THE STARS THERE ARE* **OTHERS** *WITH SUCH STRENGTH!*
YOUR MYSTIC FLAMES SHALL RESTRAIN ME *NO LONGER!*
HERCULES WILL BE *FREE!*
BUT THERE'S A *CITY* AT STAKE--!
--MAYBE THE WHOLE *STATE!*
LIES! OUR CAPTORS *DECEIVE* US, HOPING TO KEEP US PRISONERS OF *FALSE WORDS!*
NO! WE CAN'T TAKE THE *CHANCE!*
I AM *HERCULES*-- I HAVE KNOWN *THOUSANDS OF GENERATIONS* OF MEN AND *MANY TIMES* MET *SIMILAR* DECEIT! I WILL *TAKE* THIS "CHANCE"!
WAIT! SOMETHING IS...
...HAPPENING.
GRASS! ROCKS! *TREES!* I DON'T KNOW *HOW,* BUT-- *WE'RE OUT!*
SO WE ARE. BUT I'M STILL NOT *FINISHED* WITH OUR SELF-APPOINTED *GOD!*
LATER, BLAZE! NOW ALL WE'VE GOT TO DO IS--
HUH?
MAKE IT TO THE *AIRBASE* ABOUT A *MILE* FROM HERE, COMMANDEER A *PLANE* AND HEAD *COASTWARD!*
DON'T ASK *ME,* WARREN! IT JUST POPPED INTO MY *HEAD*-- LIKE THE *OLD DAYS* WHEN *PROFESSOR X* WOULD CONTACT US *TELEPATHICALLY!*


CUT ONE LAST TIME TO...
ACCURSED WITCH OF A TRAITORESS!
YOU'LL NOT LIVE TO STAND TRIAL!!
YOU HAVE A LOT TO LEARN, MY FRIEND! FIRST, THAT IT TAKES MORE THAN ARMOR TO MAKE A WARRIOR!
ZIT!
STROW!
THERE ARE THINGS YOU'VE YET TO MASTER!
LIKE TACTICS! NO GOOD COMMANDER WOULD LEAVE HIS PILOT UNCOVERED!
CRIPES! SHE SHOT OUT THE MASTER CONTROL!
WE'RE GOING INTO A DIVE!!
I HAVE THE WIDOW, GRIFFIN! RADIO THE SUBMARINE THAT AWAITS US AND TELL THEM TO SURFACE AND PICK US UP HERE!
I'LL DO IT, BUT I DON'T LIKE IT! WE'RE STILL INSIDE THE THREE-MILE LIMIT--
--AN' WHILE I DON'T MIND FIGHTIN' SUPER-HEROES, THE FEDS ARE SOMETHIN' ELSE!!


YOU HAVE DONE YOUR WORK WELL, CAPTAIN! I WILL SEE YOU ARE CITED FOR IT!
SPARE ME, COMRADE! I ONLY DO AS I AM ORDERED--
--BUT I DISAPPROVE OF THESE WITCH-HUNTS INSTIGATED BY FORCES WITHIN OUR GOVERNMENT!
CAPTAIN ANDREYIVICH! AN AMERICAN FIGHTER!
IT HAS SEEN US!
LOOK OUT, BOBBY! THEY'RE FIRING AT US!
WHOOM!
THIS THING IS SLOWER THAN THE X-PLANE-- BUT IT STILL MOVES!
IT GOT US HERE-- BUT WE BETTER GET DOWN THERE BEFORE THE SUB DIVES!
HERCULES! YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING?
AYE, LAD--
--HERCULES IS SURE!!
FTASHT!
THEY'VE ESCAPED! THE CHAMPIONS ARE HERE!!
KEEP THEM BUSY-- BUT FIND THE WIDOW!!
BLANG!


'TWAS THOU, ARMORED ONE, THAT DIDST FELL HERCULES IN THE BATTLE PAST!*
*LAST ISSUE--ARCH.
THERE SHE IS! THE DYNAMO'S GOT HER!
SKTOW!
AND THE DYNAMO SHALL KEEP HER, FOOL!
SOME HEROES! THIS IS LIKE SHOOTIN' FISH IN A BARREL!
TEACHER! THEY DARE NOT FIGHT AT FULL STRENGTH WHILE YURI HOLDS THE WIDOW!
WOK!
THEN YURI MUST BE MADE TO LET HER GO, STUDENT!
EXCUSE ME, SAILOR--
--BUT I HAVE NEED OF YOUR WEAPON!
BRIP-BRIP-BRIP!
KTANG! CLANG!
BRUSKIN, YOU ARE A FOOL,
AND SOON YOU WILL BE A DEAD FOOL!
STRAM!
YURI! HAD YOU KNOWN THE TRUTH, I WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE ACT YOU JUST COMMITTED!
BUT KNOWING YOUR IGNORANCE-- I KNOW NOW THAT YOU ARE NO MORE THAN A COLD-BLOODED MURDERER!
AND THOUGH WE TWO HAVE SHARED LOVE-- NOW WILL YOU FACE THE POWER OF DARKSTAR!!
LAYNIA! MY LOVE, NO!!


CAPTAIN! THE COMMISSAR! HE WAS NOT SLAIN BY THE DYNAMO'S BLAST!
BRUSKIN! I BEG OF YOU, COMRADE --STOP!!
I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT, CAPTAIN!
THEN FORGIVE ME, OLD COMRADE-- BUT I MUST DEFEND MY SHIP!
BLAM!
I... UNDERSTAND, CAPTAIN-- BUT I HAVE SO MUCH TO... MAKE UP FOR.
SO MUCH... PAIN CAUSED TO THOSE WHO WERE TO BE THE VANGUARD OF THE REVOLUTION.
WE ARE... OLD, CAPTAIN-- BUT THEY DESERVE THEIR TIME TO ...TRY!
BA-TOOM!
I DON'T GET IT-- WHO WAS THAT GUY?
THE WIDOW AND IVAN SEEMED TO KNOW HIM, ICEMAN--BUT THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THEY WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT JUST NOW!
'TWOULD APPEAR, MY FRIENDS, THAT THE BLACKGUARDS ARE ALL BUT VANQUISHED!
THE LION-MANED ONE IS HELPLESS, ICEMAN!
THE DYNAMO IS DOWN, IVAN PETROVITCH!
TELL ME WHAT I AM TO DO WITH HIM!
KID, I--
BACK TO THE SPOOK-ROUTINE, HUH? OH, WELL, IT'S YOUR SCENE! I WON'T KNOCK IT!


COMRADE! YOU MUST DECIDE! I AM HIS... LOVER! HOW CAN I--?
YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO, KID! I DON'T EVEN KNOW HIM! IT'S BEEN TOO MANY YEARS.
IF HE'S GOT ANY GOOD POINTS, YOU KNOW 'EM BETTER'N I EVER WILL.
DO WHAT YOU WANT WITH HIM, KID.
I JUST DON'T CARE ANY MORE.
FOOLS! YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE LAST OF THE CRIMSON DYNAMO!
LATER...
I HOPE SOMEBODY'S GOT AN EXPLANATION FOR WHAT WENT ON BACK THERE, AND FOR WHY THE CRIMSON DYNAMO WAS ALLOWED TO ESCAPE!
THERE WAS A SIDE OF THIS BATTLE KNOWN ONLY TO A FEW OF US, ANGEL! YOU MUST TRUST THAT WHAT WE DID WAS RIGHT--
--AND MAYBE SOMEDAY YOU WILL LEARN ALL!
I... THANK YOU, MADAME NATASHA. I HOPE I WILL PROVE WORTHY OF THAT TRUST!
SWELL! THE TEAM FOR THE "COMMON MAN" NOW EVEN KEEPS SECRETS FROM ITSELF! MAYBE YOU WERE RIGHT, IVAN! MAYBE THE CHAMPIONS ARE A BUST!
IVAN PETROVITCH SAYS NOTHING, BUT HIS EYES ARE HOODED BY A MASK IT WILL TAKE YEARS TO DRAW AWAY. THE TRIP BACK TO LOS ANGELES IS MADE... IN SILENCE.
NEXT:
THE CHAMPIONS MOVE INTO THEIR NEW HEADQUARTERS IN A POWER-PACKED ISSUE CHOCK-FULL OF GUEST-STARS AS THEY FACE...
The SHADOW FROM THE STARS!!

THE CHAMPIONS
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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS™
GUEST STARRING BLACK GOLIATH!*
KANE & LAYTON
*PROVIDING HE LIVES THAT LONG!

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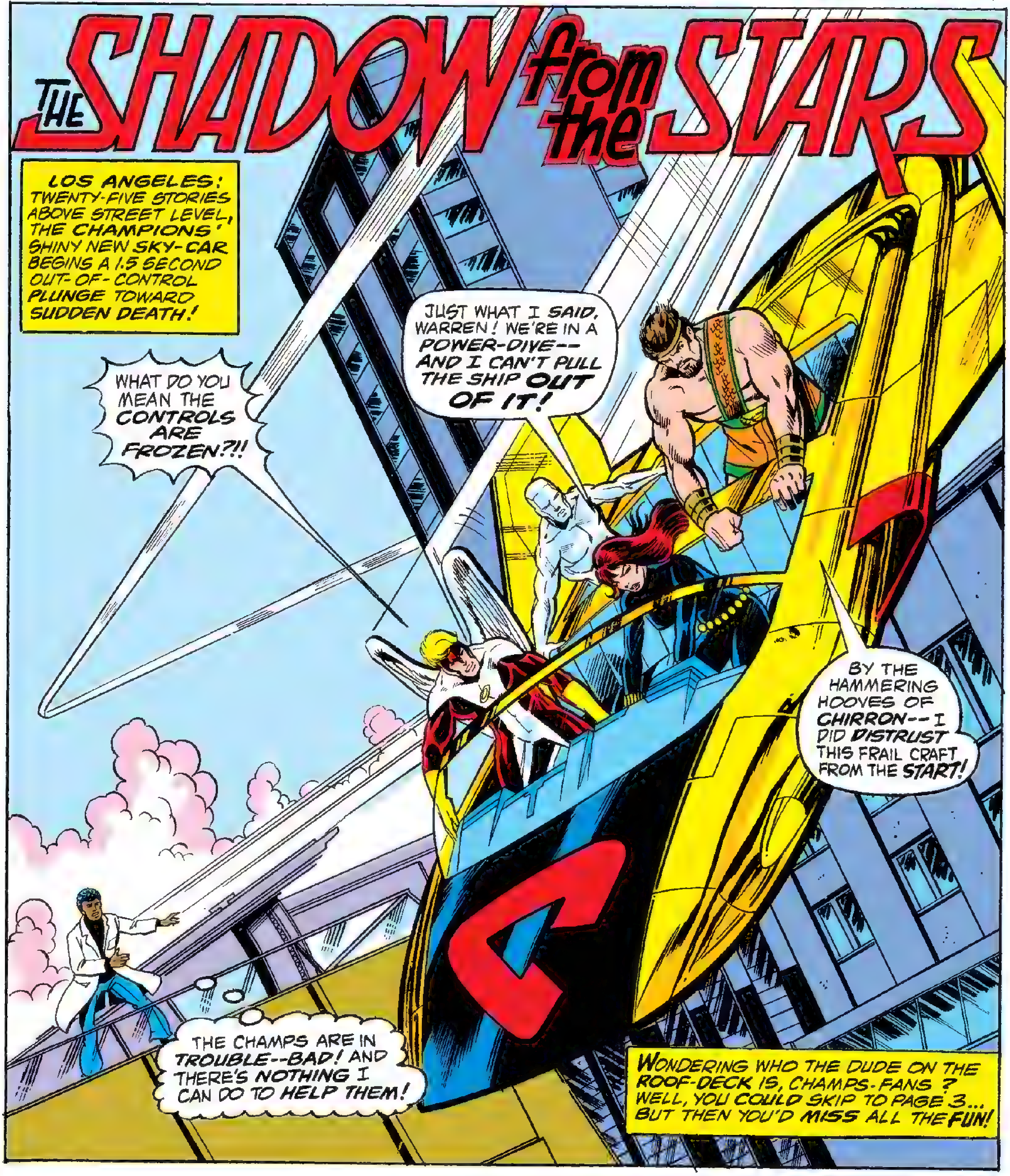
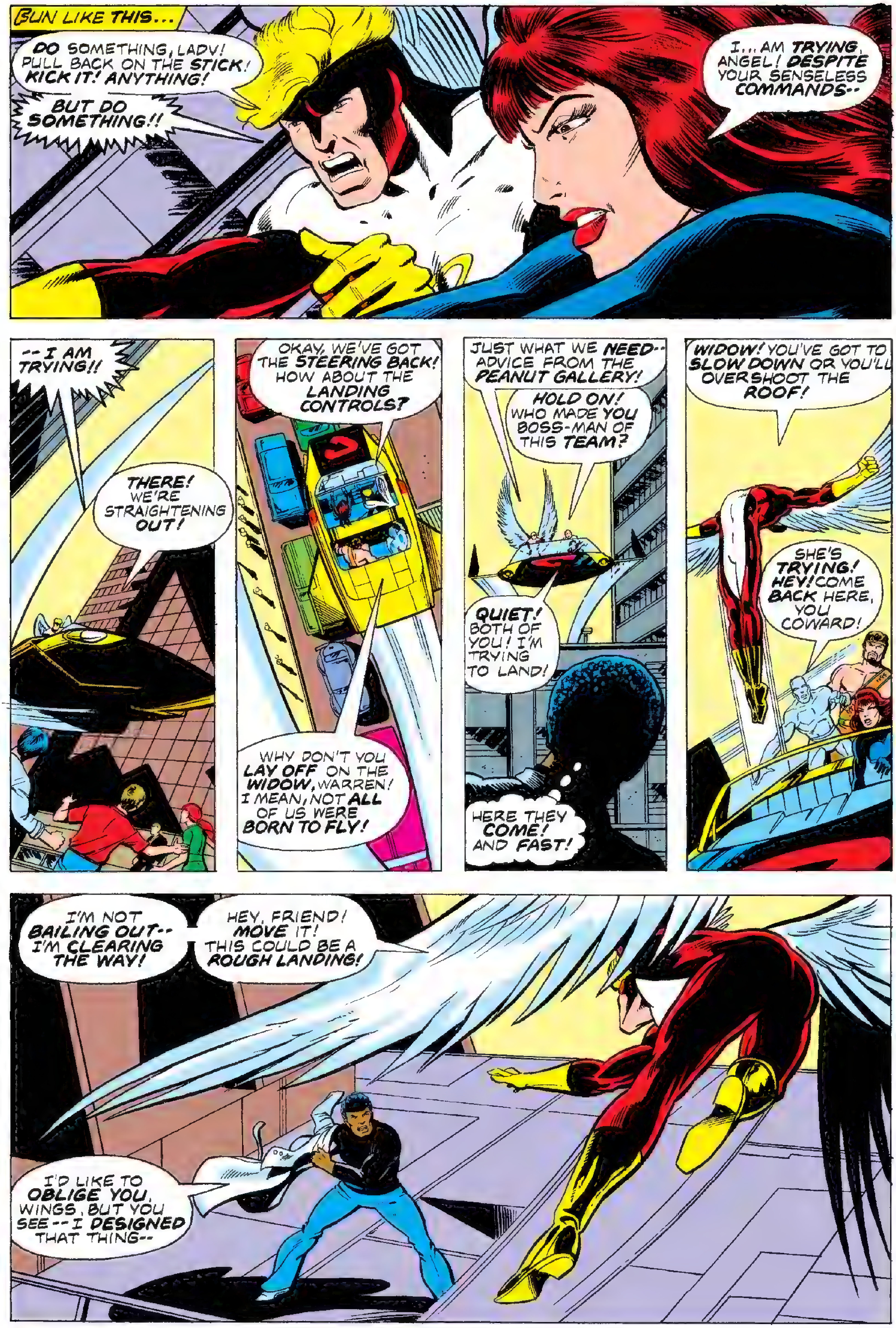
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

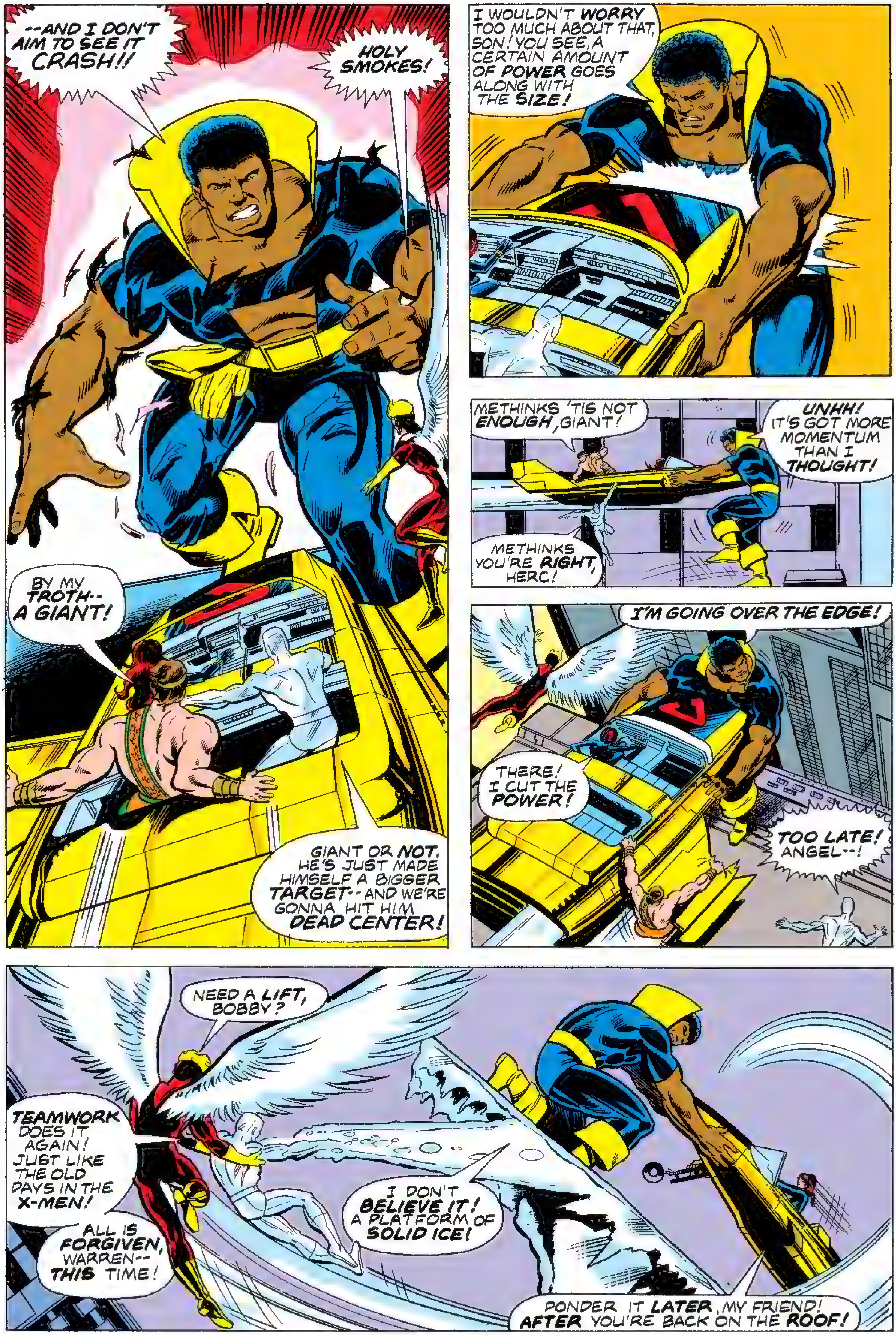
THE CHAMPIONS™

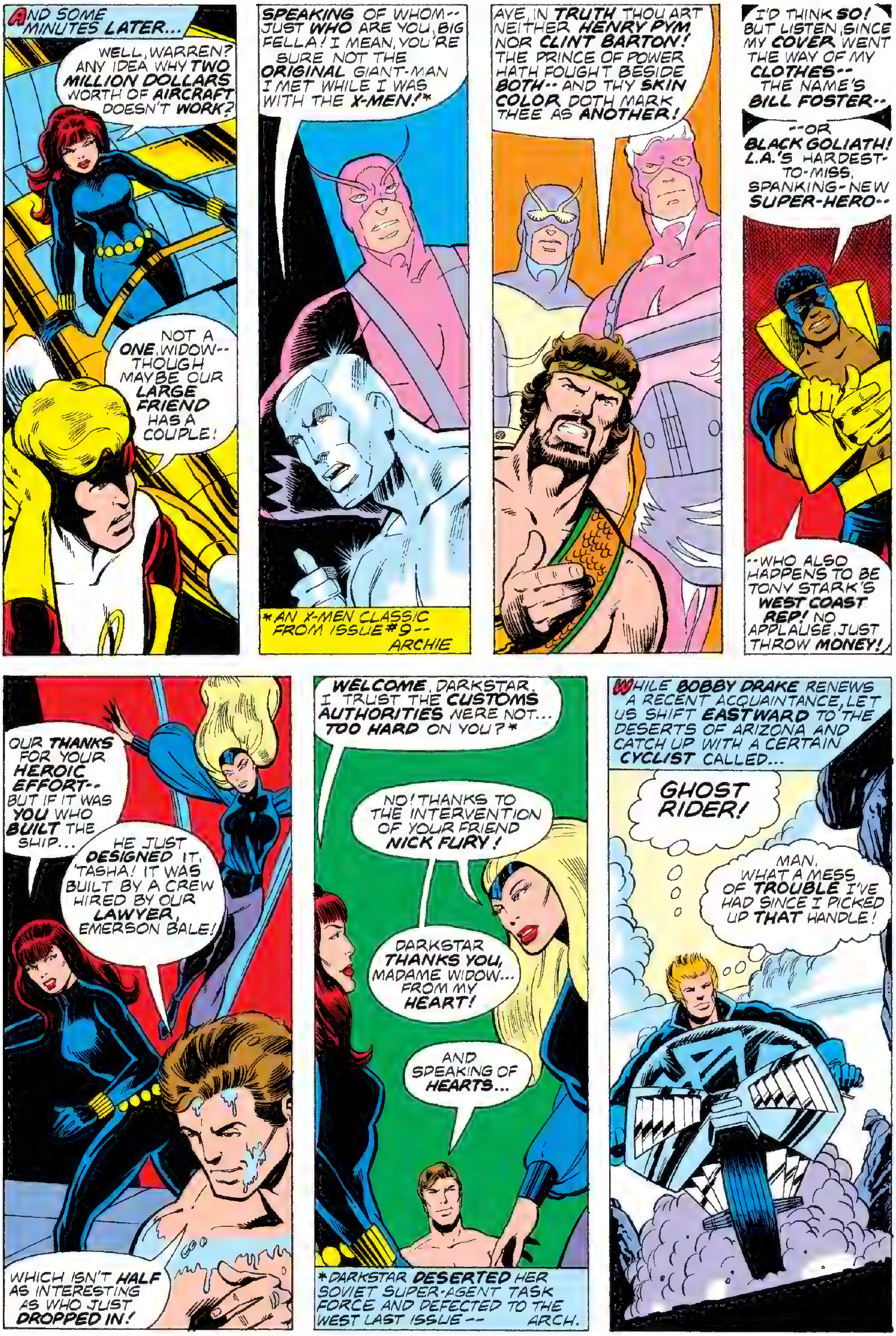
SCRIPT by BILL MANTLO | INKS by BOB LAYTON | LETTERS by PATTERSON | COLORS by D. WARFIELD | EDITING ARCHIE GOODWIN | AND INTRODUCING THE PULSE-POUNDING PENCILS OF JOHN BYRNE--ARTIST

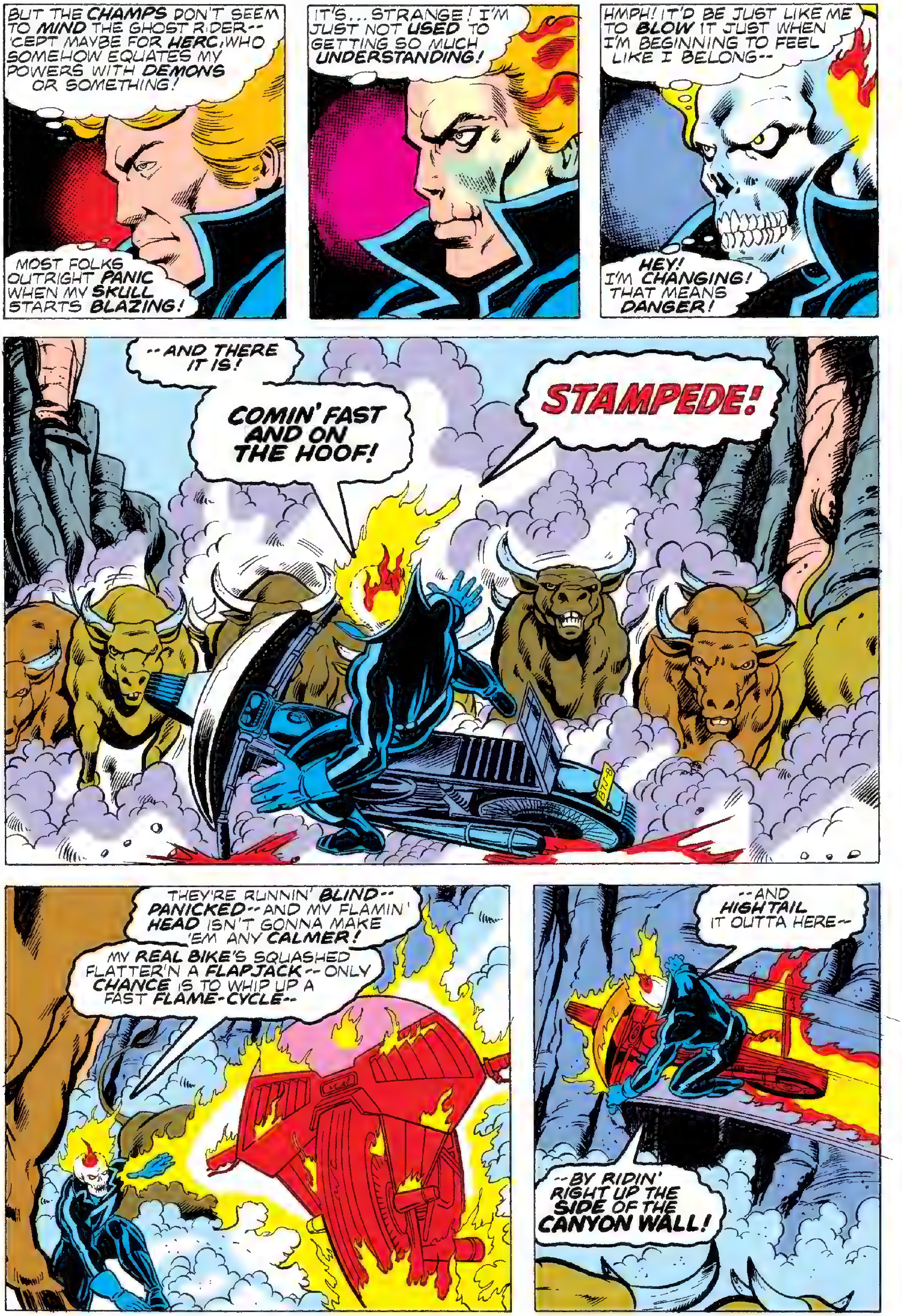
THE SHADOW from the STARS

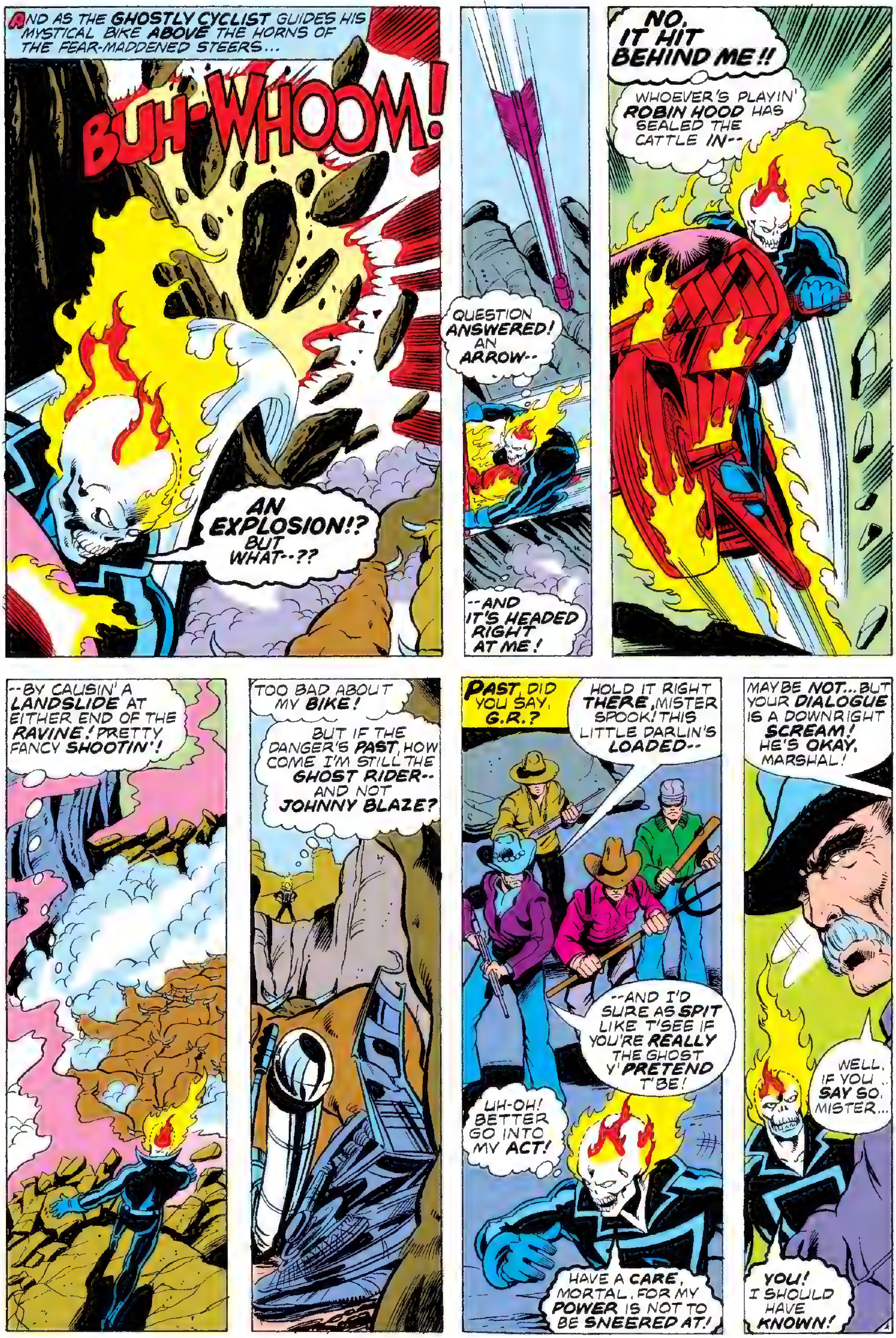

LOS ANGELES: TWENTY-FIVE STORIES ABOVE STREET LEVEL, THE CHAMPIONS' SHINY NEW SKY-CAR BEGINS A 1.5 SECOND OUT-OF-CONTROL PLUNGE TOWARD SUDDEN DEATH!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE CONTROLS ARE FROZEN?!!
JUST WHAT I SAID, WARREN! WE'RE IN A POWER-DIVE-- AND I CAN'T PULL THE SHIP OUT OF IT!
BY THE HAMMERING HOOVES OF CHIRRON-- I DID DISTRUST THIS FRAIL CRAFT FROM THE START!
THE CHAMPS ARE IN TROUBLE--BAD! AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO HELP THEM!
WONDERING WHO THE DUDE ON THE ROOF-DECK IS, CHAMPS-FANS? WELL, YOU COULD SKIP TO PAGE 3... BUT THEN YOU'D MISS ALL THE FUN!

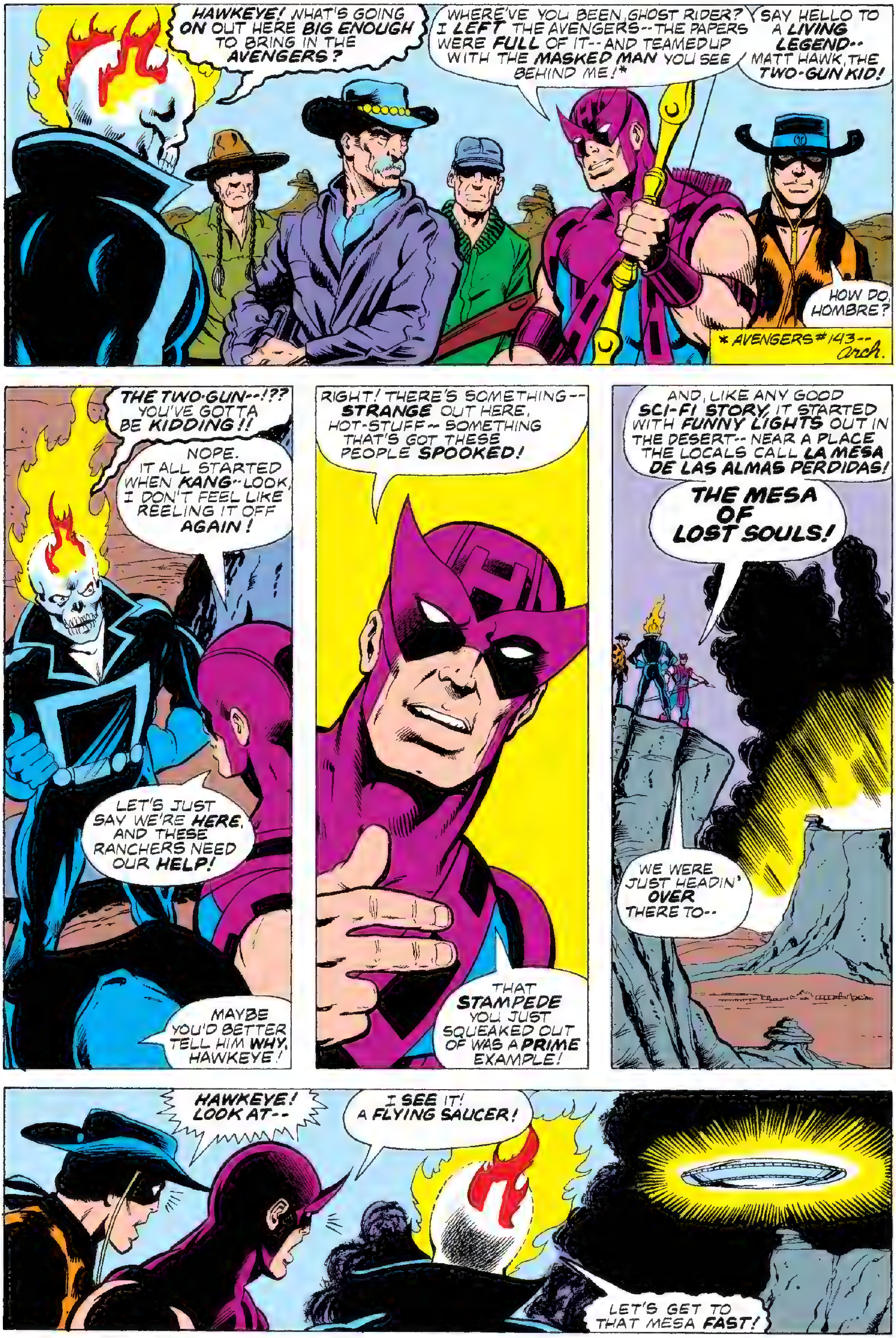

BUN LIKE THIS...
DO SOMETHING, LADY! PULL BACK ON THE STICK! KICK IT! ANYTHING!
BUT DO SOMETHING!!
I...AM TRYING, ANGEL! DESPITE YOUR SENSELESS COMMANDS--
--I AM TRYING!!
THERE! WE'RE STRAIGHTENING OUT!
OKAY, WE'VE GOT THE STEERING BACK! HOW ABOUT THE LANDING CONTROLS?
WHY DON'T YOU LAY OFF ON THE WIDOW, WARREN! I MEAN, NOT ALL OF US WERE BORN TO FLY!
JUST WHAT WE NEED-- ADVICE FROM THE PEANUT GALLERY!
HOLD ON! WHO MADE YOU BOSS-MAN OF THIS TEAM?
QUIET! BOTH OF YOU! I'M TRYING TO LAND!
HERE THEY COME! AND FAST!
WIDOW! YOU'VE GOT TO SLOW DOWN OR YOU'LL OVERSHOOT THE ROOF!
SHE'S TRYING! HEY! COME BACK HERE, YOU COWARD!
I'M NOT BAILING OUT-- I'M CLEARING THE WAY!
HEY, FRIEND! MOVE IT! THIS COULD BE A ROUGH LANDING!
I'D LIKE TO OBLIGE YOU, WINGS, BUT YOU SEE -- I DESIGNED THAT THING--

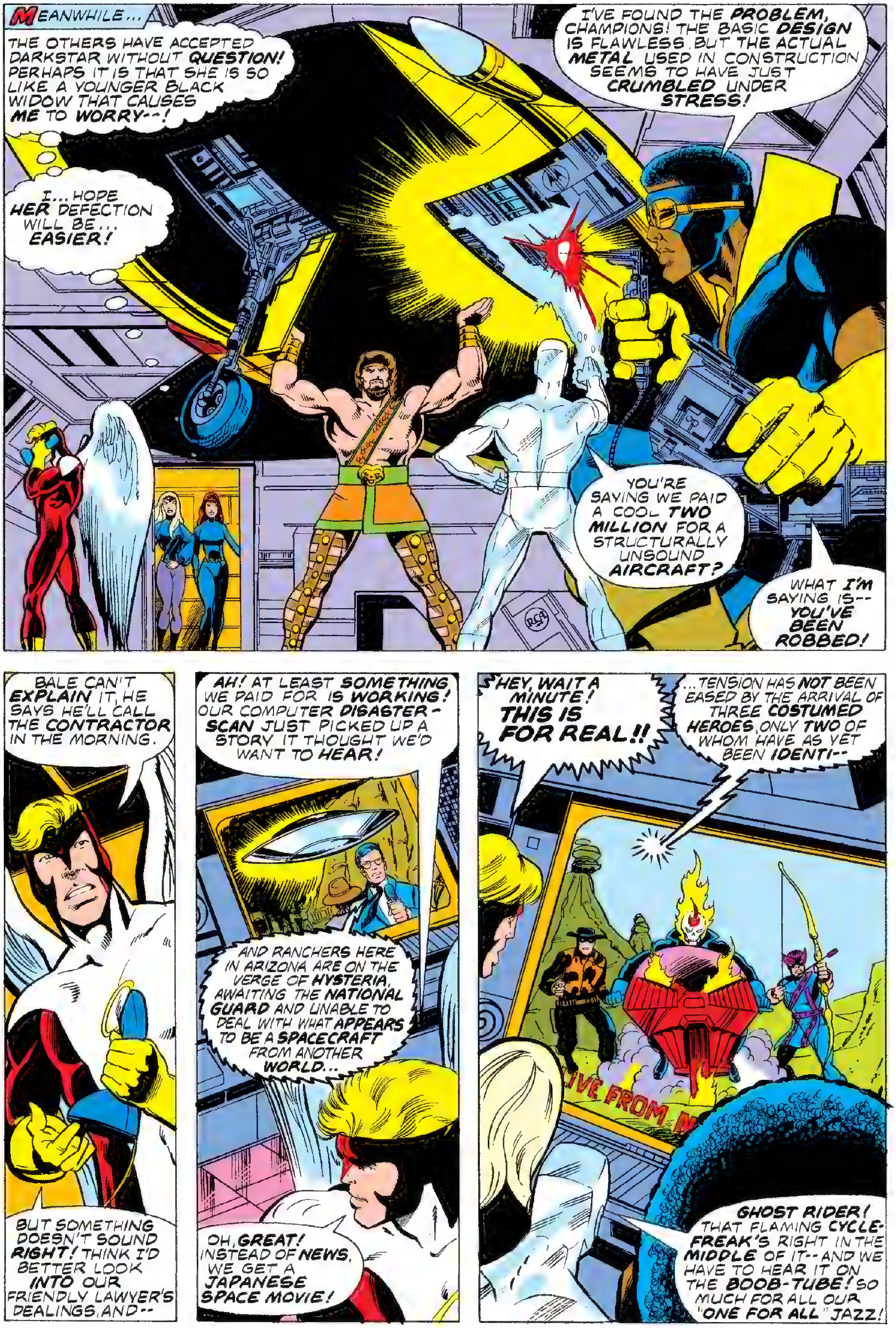

--AND I DON'T AIM TO SEE IT CRASH!!
HOLY SMOKES!
BY MY TROTH-- A GIANT!
GIANT OR NOT, HE'S JUST MADE HIMSELF A BIGGER TARGET--AND WE'RE GONNA HIT HIM DEAD CENTER!
I WOULDN'T WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT THAT, SON! YOU SEE, A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF POWER GOES ALONG WITH THE SIZE!
METHINKS 'TIS NOT ENOUGH, GIANT!
UNHH! IT'S GOT MORE MOMENTUM THAN I THOUGHT!
METHINKS YOU'RE RIGHT, HERC!
I'M GOING OVER THE EDGE!
THERE! I CUT THE POWER!
TOO LATE! ANGEL--!
NEED A LIFT, BOBBY?
TEAMWORK DOES IT AGAIN! JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS IN THE X-MEN!
ALL IS FORGIVEN, WARREN-- THIS TIME!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! A PLATFORM OF SOLID ICE!
PONDER IT LATER, MY FRIEND! AFTER YOU'RE BACK ON THE ROOF!

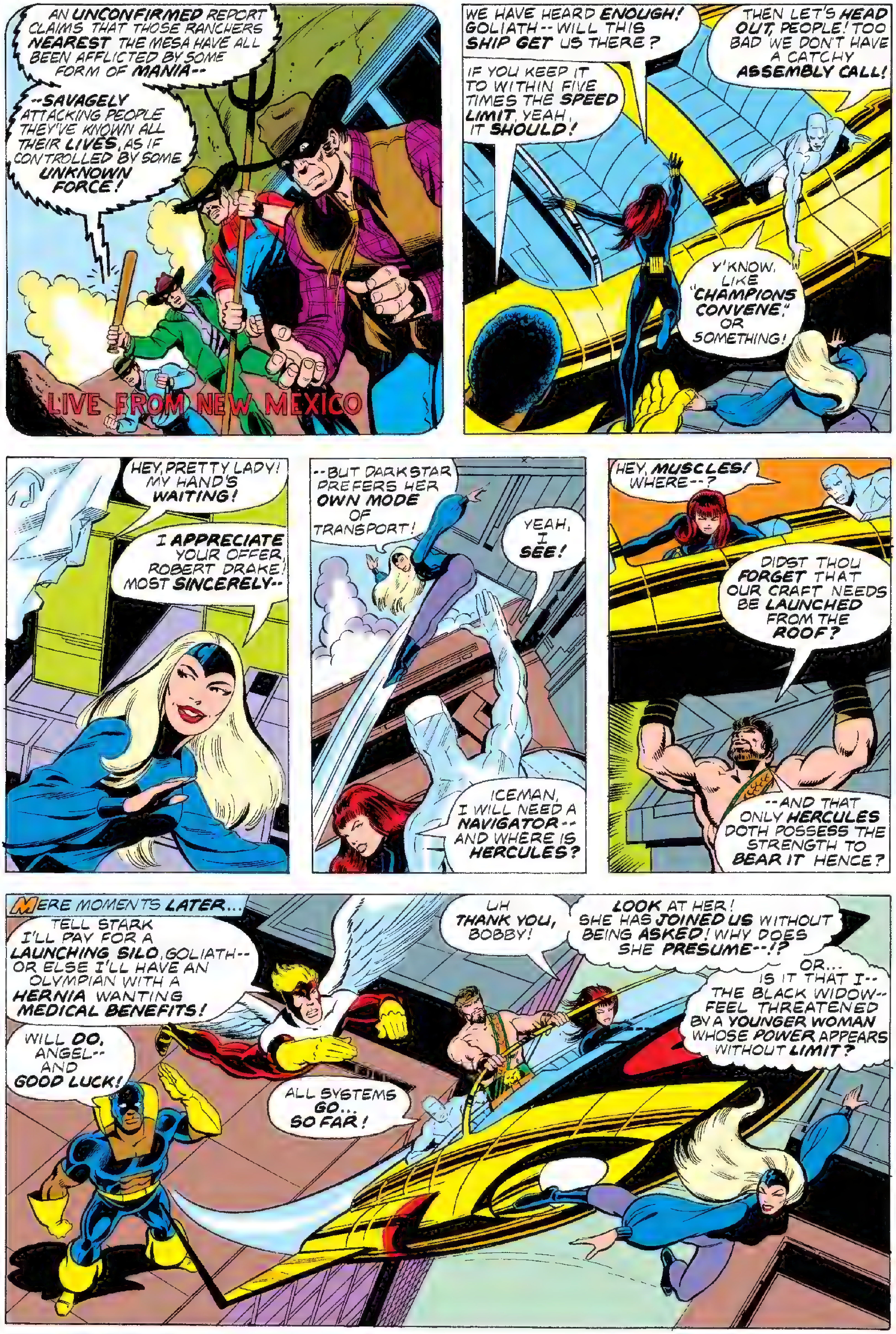

AND SOME MINUTES LATER...
WELL, WARREN? ANY IDEA WHY TWO MILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF AIRCRAFT DOESN'T WORK?
NOT A ONE, WIDOW-- THOUGH MAYBE OUR LARGE FRIEND HAS A COUPLE!
SPEAKING OF WHOM-- JUST WHO ARE YOU, BIG FELLA! I MEAN, YOU'RE SURE NOT THE ORIGINAL GIANT-MAN I MET WHILE I WAS WITH THE X-MEN!*
*AN X-MEN CLASSIC FROM ISSUE #9 -- ARCHIE
AYE, IN TRUTH THOU ART NEITHER HENRY PYM NOR CLINT BARTON! THE PRINCE OF POWER HATH FOUGHT BESIDE BOTH-- AND THY SKIN COLOR DOTH MARK THEE AS ANOTHER!
I'D THINK SO! BUT LISTEN, SINCE MY COVER WENT THE WAY OF MY CLOTHES-- THE NAME'S BILL FOSTER--
--OR BLACK GOLIATH! L.A.'S HARDEST-TO-MISS, SPANKING-NEW SUPER-HERO--
--WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE TONY STARK'S WEST COAST REP! NO APPLAUSE, JUST THROW MONEY!
OUR THANKS FOR YOUR HEROIC EFFORT-- BUT IF IT WAS YOU WHO BUILT THE SHIP...
HE JUST DESIGNED IT, 'TASHA! IT WAS BUILT BY A CREW HIRED BY OUR LAWYER, EMERSON BALE!
WHICH ISN'T HALF AS INTERESTING AS WHO JUST DROPPED IN!
WELCOME, DARKSTAR. I TRUST THE CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES WERE NOT... TOO HARD ON YOU?*
NO! THANKS TO THE INTERVENTION OF YOUR FRIEND NICK FURY!
DARKSTAR THANKS YOU, MADAME WIDOW... FROM MY HEART!
AND SPEAKING OF HEARTS...
*DARKSTAR DESERTED HER SOVIET SUPER-AGENT TASK FORCE AND DEFECTED TO THE WEST LAST ISSUE -- ARCH.
WHILE BOBBY DRAKE RENEWS A RECENT ACQUAINTANCE, LET US SHIFT EASTWARD TO THE DESERTS OF ARIZONA AND CATCH UP WITH A CERTAIN CYCLIST CALLED...
GHOST RIDER!
MAN, WHAT A MESS OF TROUBLE I'VE HAD SINCE I PICKED UP THAT HANDLE!

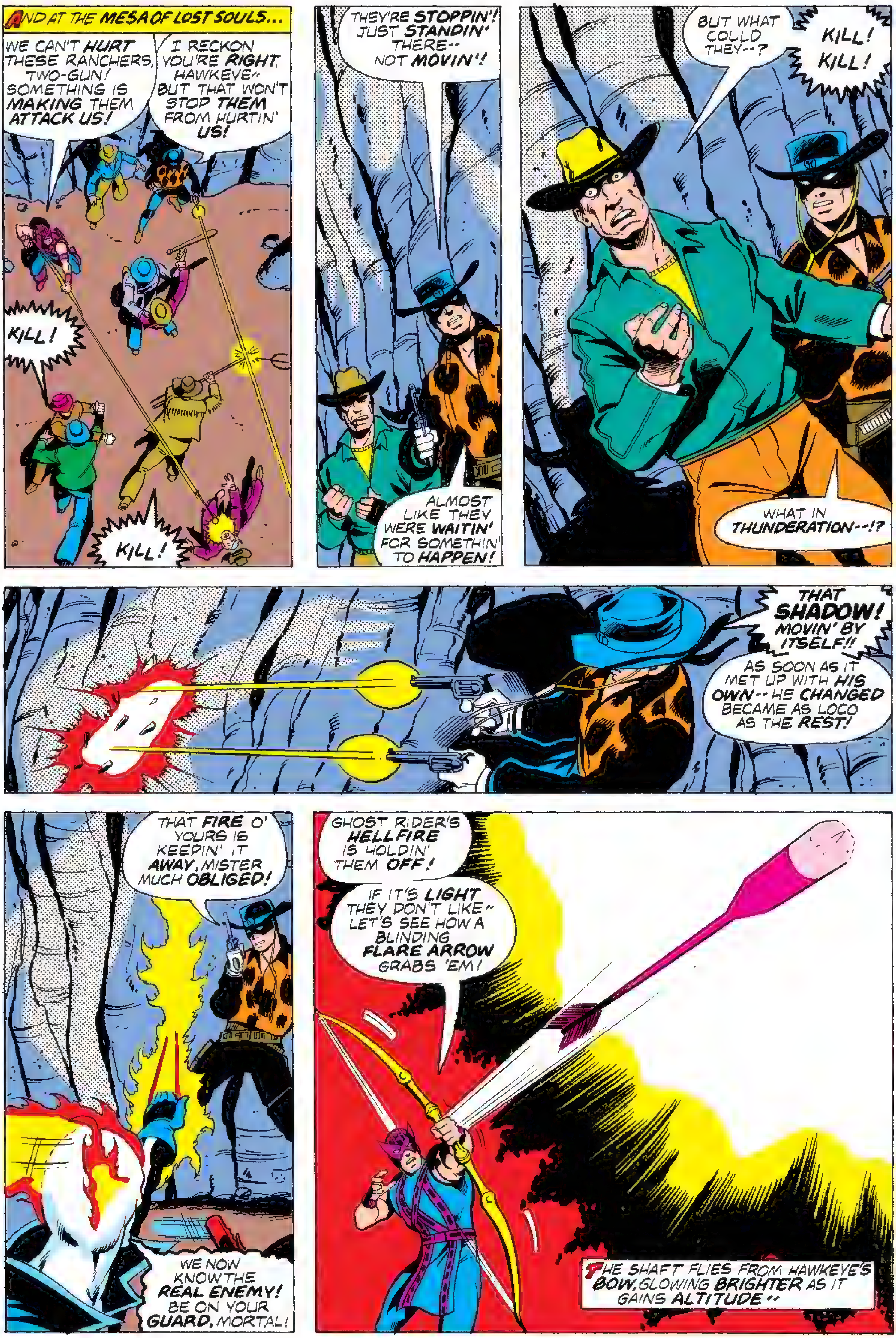

BUT THE CHAMPS DON'T SEEM TO MIND THE GHOST RIDER-- 'CEPT MAYBE FOR HERC, WHO SOMEHOW EQUATES MY POWERS WITH DEMONS OR SOMETHING!
MOST FOLKS OUTRIGHT PANIC WHEN MY SKULL STARTS BLAZING!
IT'S... STRANGE! I'M JUST NOT USED TO GETTING SO MUCH UNDERSTANDING!
HMPH! IT'D BE JUST LIKE ME TO BLOW IT JUST WHEN I'M BEGINNING TO FEEL LIKE I BELONG--
HEY! I'M CHANGING! THAT MEANS DANGER!
--AND THERE IT IS!
COMIN' FAST AND ON THE HOOF!
STAMPEDE!
THEY'RE RUNNIN' BLIND-- PANICKED--AND MY FLAMIN' HEAD ISN'T GONNA MAKE 'EM ANY CALMER!
MY REAL BIKE'S SQUASHED FLATTER'N A FLAPJACK--ONLY CHANCE IS TO WHIP UP A FAST FLAME-CYCLE--
--AND HIGHTAIL IT OUTTA HERE--
--BY RIDIN' RIGHT UP THE SIDE OF THE CANYON WALL!

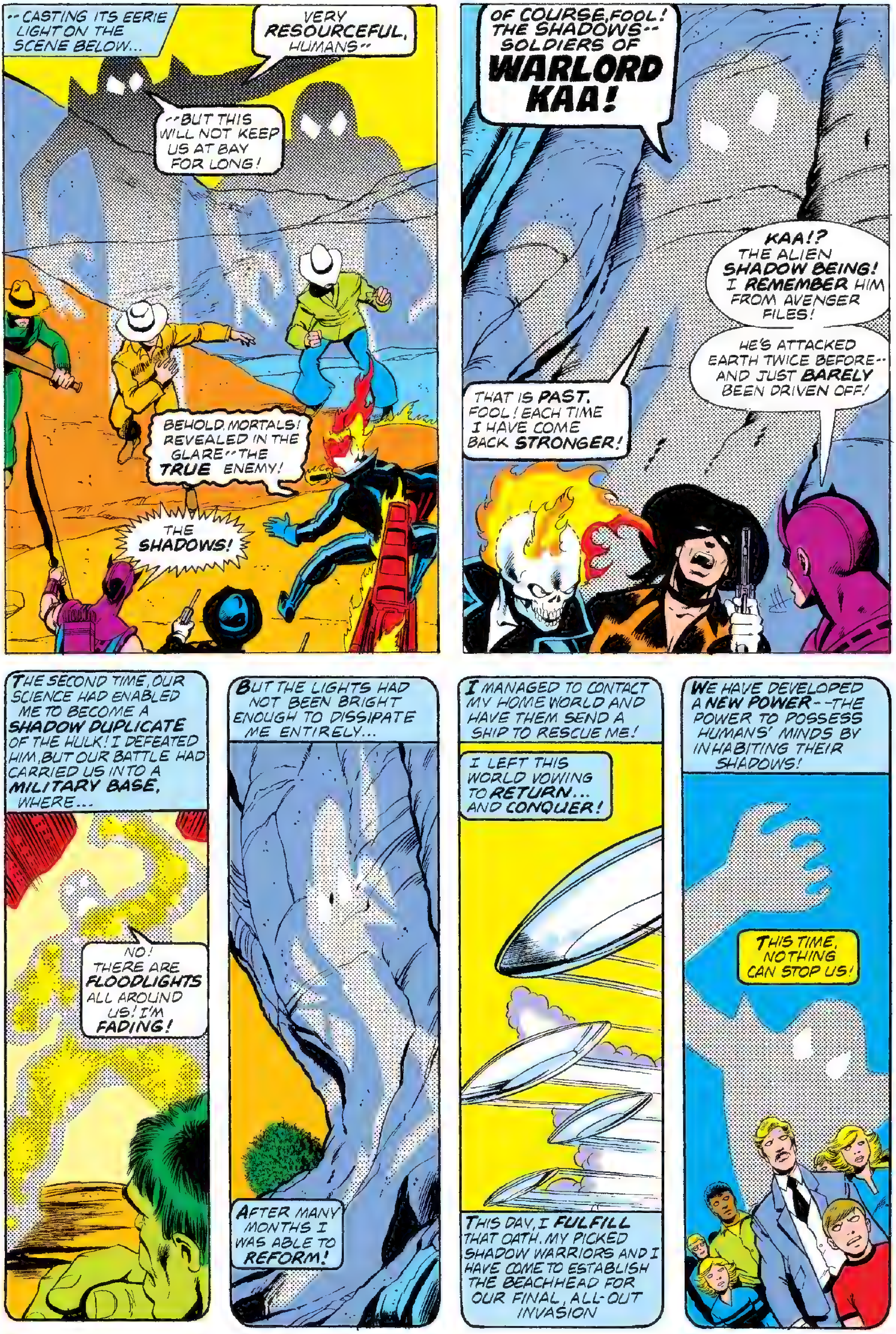

AND AS THE **GHOSTLY CYCLIST** GUIDES HIS MYSTICAL BIKE **ABOVE** THE HORNS OF THE FEAR-MADDENED STEERS...
BUH-WHOOM!
AN EXPLOSION!? BUT WHAT--??
QUESTION **ANSWERED!** AN **ARROW**--
--**AND IT'S HEADED RIGHT AT ME!**
NO, IT HIT BEHIND ME!!
WHOEVER'S PLAYIN' **ROBIN HOOD** HAS SEALED THE CATTLE **IN**--
--BY CAUSIN' A **LANDSLIDE** AT EITHER END OF THE **RAVINE!** PRETTY FANCY **SHOOTIN'!**
TOO BAD ABOUT MY **BIKE!**
BUT IF THE DANGER'S **PAST**, HOW COME I'M STILL THE **GHOST RIDER**-- AND NOT **JOHNNY BLAZE?**
PAST, DID YOU SAY, **G.R.?**
HOLD IT RIGHT **THERE**, MISTER SPOOK! THIS LITTLE DARLIN'S **LOADED**--
--AND I'D SURE AS **SPIT** LIKE T'SEE IF YOU'RE **REALLY** THE GHOST Y' **PRETEND** T'BE!
UH-OH! BETTER GO INTO MY **ACT!**
HAVE A **CARE**, MORTAL, FOR MY **POWER** IS NOT TO BE **SNEERED AT!**
MAYBE **NOT**...BUT YOUR **DIALOGUE** IS A DOWNRIGHT **SCREAM!** HE'S **OKAY**, MARSHAL!
WELL, IF YOU **SAY SO**, MISTER...
YOU! I SHOULD HAVE **KNOWN!**

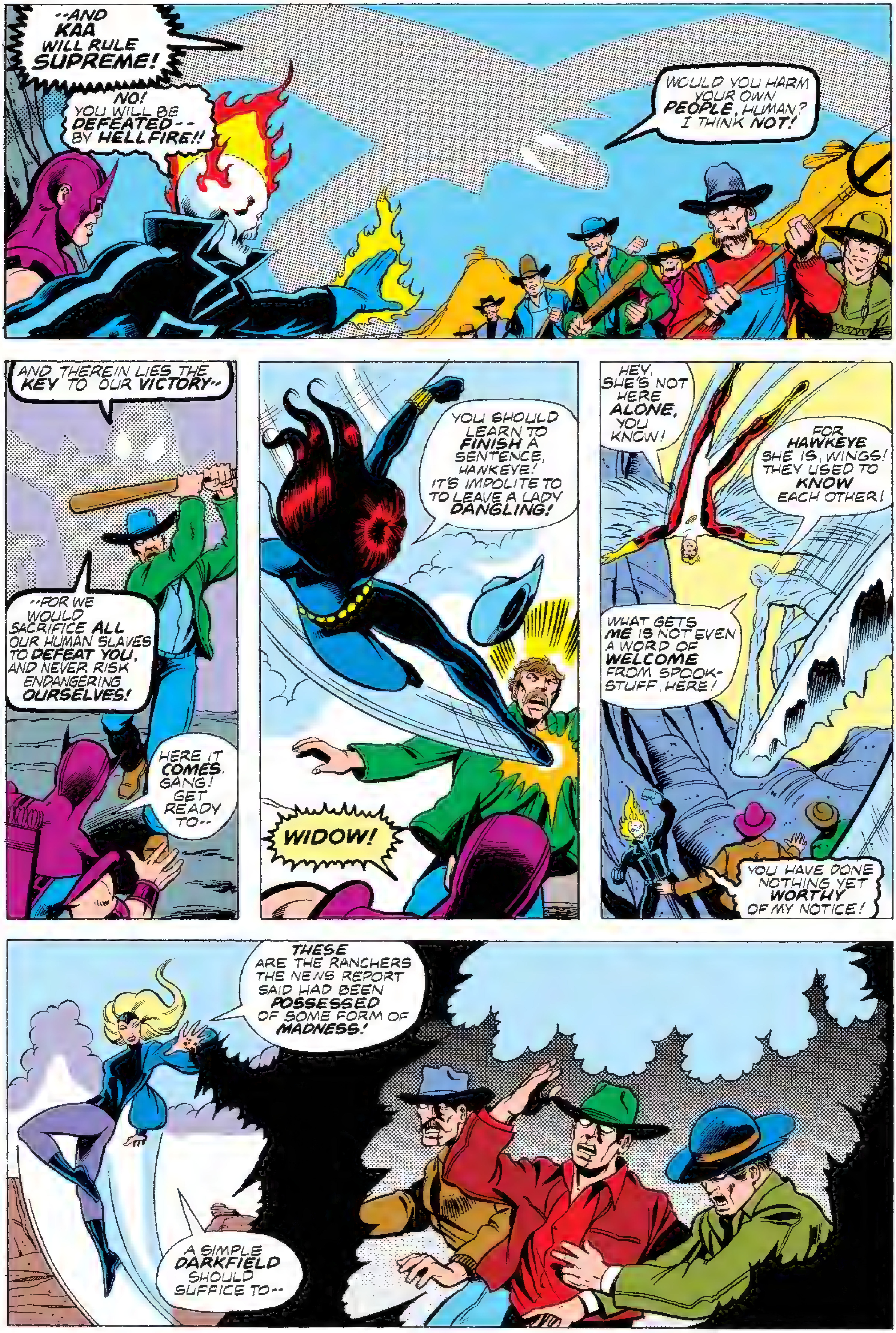

HAWKEYE! WHAT'S GOING ON OUT HERE BIG ENOUGH TO BRING IN THE AVENGERS?
WHERE'VE YOU BEEN, GHOST RIDER? I LEFT THE AVENGERS--THE PAPERS WERE FULL OF IT--AND TEAMED UP WITH THE MASKED MAN YOU SEE BEHIND ME!*
SAY HELLO TO A LIVING LEGEND-- MATT HAWK, THE TWO-GUN KID!
HOW DO, HOMBRE?
* AVENGERS #143-- Arch.
THE TWO-GUN--!?? YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING!!
NOPE. IT ALL STARTED WHEN KANG--LOOK, I DON'T FEEL LIKE REELING IT OFF AGAIN!
LET'S JUST SAY WE'RE HERE, AND THESE RANCHERS NEED OUR HELP!
MAYBE YOU'D BETTER TELL HIM WHY, HAWKEYE!
RIGHT! THERE'S SOMETHING--STRANGE OUT HERE, HOT-STUFF--SOMETHING THAT'S GOT THESE PEOPLE SPOOKED!
THAT STAMPEDE YOU JUST SQUEAKED OUT OF WAS A PRIME EXAMPLE!
AND, LIKE ANY GOOD SCI-FI STORY, IT STARTED WITH FUNNY LIGHTS OUT IN THE DESERT--NEAR A PLACE THE LOCALS CALL LA MESA DE LAS ALMAS PERDIDAS!
THE MESA OF LOST SOULS!
WE WERE JUST HEADIN' OVER THERE TO--
HAWKEYE! LOOK AT--
I SEE IT! A FLYING SAUCER!
LET'S GET TO THAT MESA FAST!

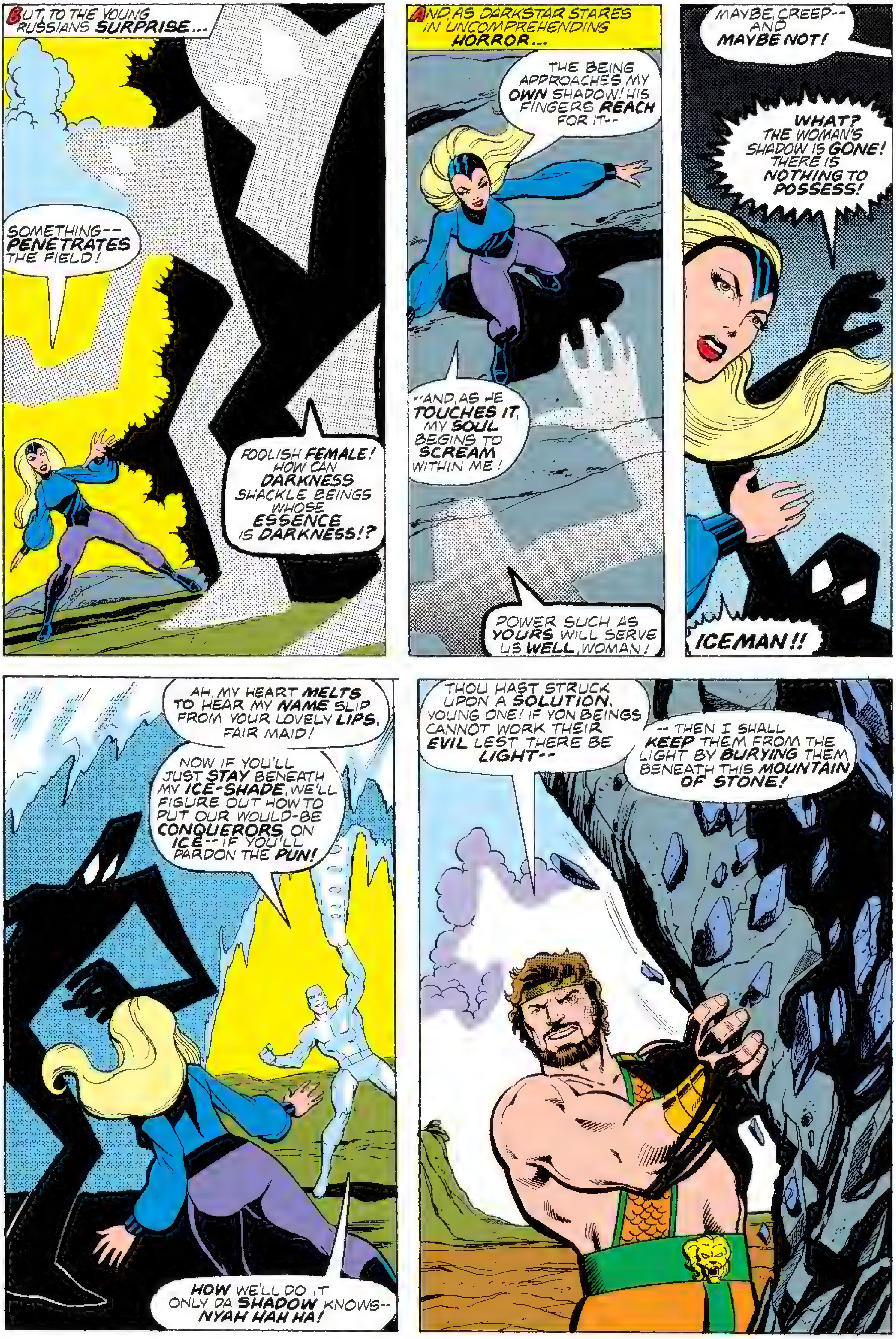

MEANWHILE...
THE OTHERS HAVE ACCEPTED DARKSTAR WITHOUT QUESTION! PERHAPS IT IS THAT SHE IS SO LIKE A YOUNGER BLACK WIDOW THAT CAUSES ME TO WORRY--!
I... HOPE HER DEFECTION WILL BE... EASIER!
I'VE FOUND THE PROBLEM, CHAMPIONS! THE BASIC DESIGN IS FLAWLESS, BUT THE ACTUAL METAL USED IN CONSTRUCTION SEEMS TO HAVE JUST CRUMBLED UNDER STRESS!
YOU'RE SAYING WE PAID A COOL TWO MILLION FOR A STRUCTURALLY UNSOUND AIRCRAFT?
WHAT I'M SAYING IS-- YOU'VE BEEN ROBBED!
BALE CAN'T EXPLAIN IT, HE SAYS HE'LL CALL THE CONTRACTOR IN THE MORNING.
BUT SOMETHING DOESN'T SOUND RIGHT! THINK I'D BETTER LOOK INTO OUR FRIENDLY LAWYER'S DEALINGS, AND--
AH! AT LEAST SOMETHING WE PAID FOR IS WORKING! OUR COMPUTER DISASTER-SCAN JUST PICKED UP A STORY IT THOUGHT WE'D WANT TO HEAR!
AND RANCHERS HERE IN ARIZONA ARE ON THE VERGE OF HYSTERIA, AWAITING THE NATIONAL GUARD AND UNABLE TO DEAL WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SPACECRAFT FROM ANOTHER WORLD...
OH, GREAT! INSTEAD OF NEWS, WE GET A JAPANESE SPACE MOVIE!
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE! THIS IS FOR REAL!!
...TENSION HAS NOT BEEN EASED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THREE COSTUMED HEROES, ONLY TWO OF WHOM HAVE AS YET BEEN IDENTI--
IVE FROM N
GHOST RIDER! THAT FLAMING CYCLE-FREAK'S RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT--AND WE HAVE TO HEAR IT ON THE BOOB-TUBE! SO MUCH FOR ALL OUR "ONE FOR ALL" JAZZ!

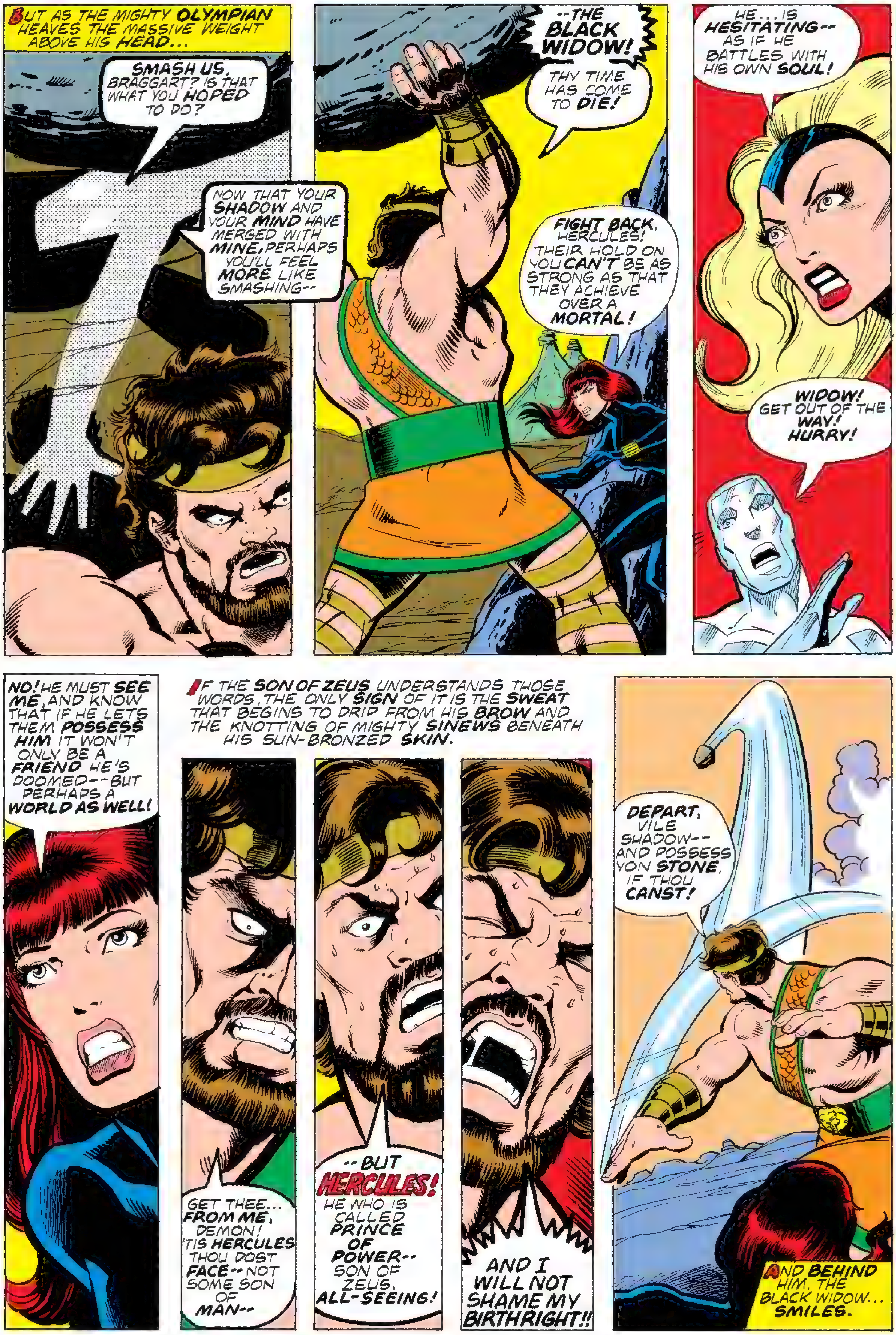

AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT CLAIMS THAT THOSE RANCHERS NEAREST THE MESA HAVE ALL BEEN AFFLICTED BY SOME FORM OF MANIA--
--SAVAGELY ATTACKING PEOPLE THEY'VE KNOWN ALL THEIR LIVES, AS IF CONTROLLED BY SOME UNKNOWN FORCE!
LIVE FROM NEW MEXICO
WE HAVE HEARD ENOUGH! GOLIATH -- WILL THIS SHIP GET US THERE?
IF YOU KEEP IT TO WITHIN FIVE TIMES THE SPEED LIMIT, YEAH, IT SHOULD!
THEN LET'S HEAD OUT, PEOPLE! TOO BAD WE DON'T HAVE A CATCHY ASSEMBLY CALL!
Y'KNOW, LIKE "CHAMPIONS CONVENE," OR SOMETHING!
HEY, PRETTY LADY! MY HAND'S WAITING!
I APPRECIATE YOUR OFFER, ROBERT DRAKE! MOST SINCERELY--
--BUT DARKSTAR PREFERS HER OWN MODE OF TRANSPORT!
YEAH, I SEE!
ICEMAN, I WILL NEED A NAVIGATOR -- AND WHERE IS HERCULES?
HEY, MUSCLES! WHERE--?
DIDST THOU FORGET THAT OUR CRAFT NEEDS BE LAUNCHED FROM THE ROOF?
--AND THAT ONLY HERCULES DOTH POSSESS THE STRENGTH TO BEAR IT HENCE?
MERE MOMENTS LATER...
TELL STARK I'LL PAY FOR A LAUNCHING SILO, GOLIATH-- OR ELSE I'LL HAVE AN OLYMPIAN WITH A HERNIA WANTING MEDICAL BENEFITS!
WILL DO, ANGEL-- AND GOOD LUCK!
UH THANK YOU, BOBBY!
LOOK AT HER! SHE HAS JOINED US WITHOUT BEING ASKED! WHY DOES SHE PRESUME--!?
OR... IS IT THAT I-- THE BLACK WIDOW-- FEEL THREATENED BY A YOUNGER WOMAN WHOSE POWER APPEARS WITHOUT LIMIT?
ALL SYSTEMS GO... SO FAR!

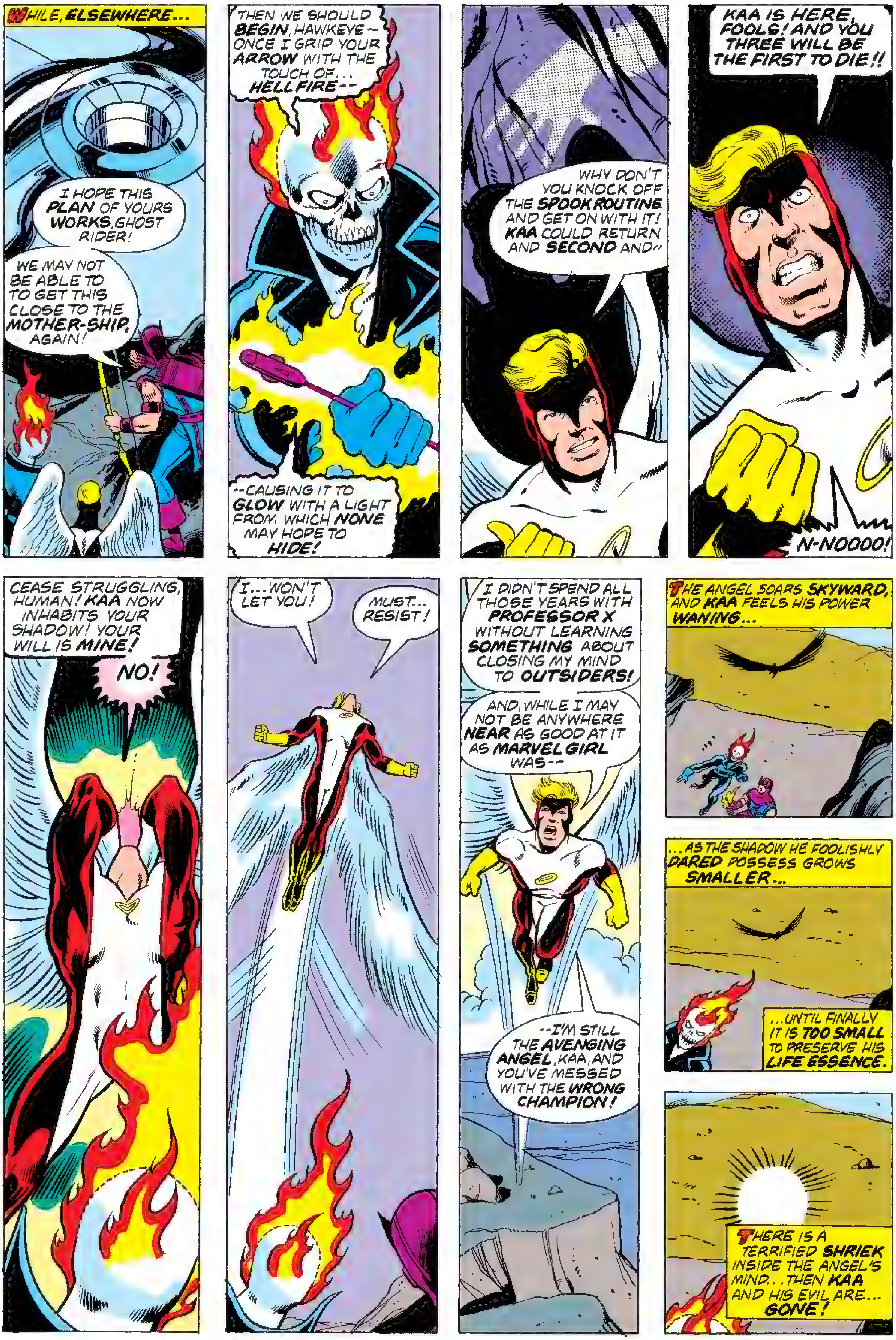

AND AT THE MESA OF LOST SOULS...
WE CAN'T HURT THESE RANCHERS, TWO-GUN! SOMETHING IS MAKING THEM ATTACK US!
I RECKON YOU'RE RIGHT, HAWKEYE-- BUT THAT WON'T STOP THEM FROM HURTIN' US!
KILL!
KILL!
THEY'RE STOPPIN'! JUST STANDIN' THERE-- NOT MOVIN'!
ALMOST LIKE THEY WERE WAITIN' FOR SOMETHIN' TO HAPPEN!
BUT WHAT COULD THEY--?
KILL! KILL!
WHAT IN THUNDERATION--!?
THAT SHADOW! MOVIN' BY ITSELF!!
AS SOON AS IT MET UP WITH HIS OWN-- HE CHANGED BECAME AS LOCO AS THE REST!
THAT FIRE O' YOURS IS KEEPIN' IT AWAY, MISTER. MUCH OBLIGED!
WE NOW KNOW THE REAL ENEMY! BE ON YOUR GUARD, MORTAL!
GHOST RIDER'S HELLFIRE IS HOLDIN' THEM OFF!
IF IT'S LIGHT THEY DON'T LIKE-- LET'S SEE HOW A BLINDING FLARE ARROW GRABS 'EM!
THE SHAFT FLIES FROM HAWKEYE'S BOW, GLOWING BRIGHTER AS IT GAINS ALTITUDE--

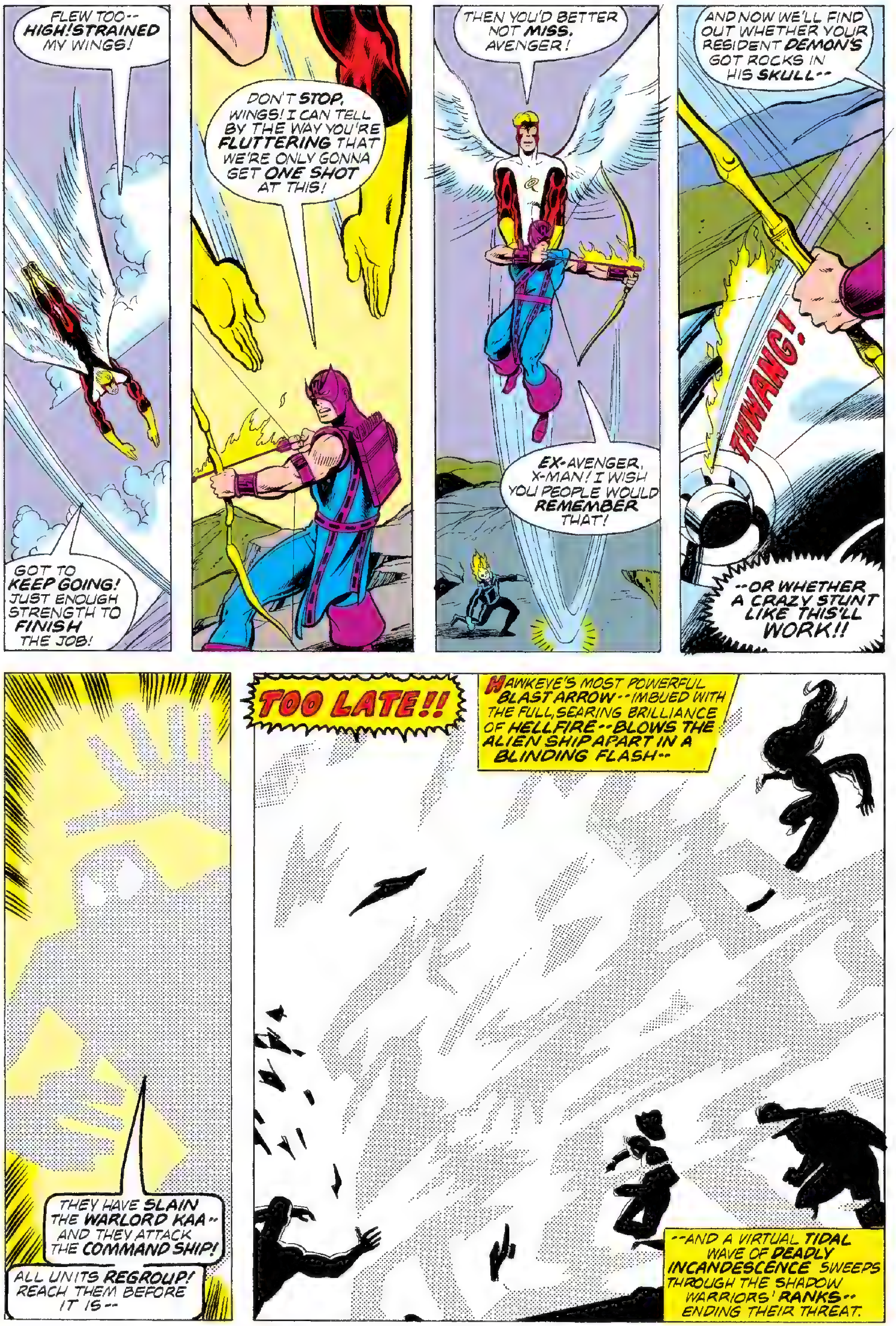

--CASTING ITS EERIE LIGHT ON THE SCENE BELOW...
VERY RESOURCEFUL, HUMANS--
--BUT THIS WILL NOT KEEP US AT BAY FOR LONG!
BEHOLD, MORTALS! REVEALED IN THE GLARE--THE TRUE ENEMY!
THE SHADOWS!
OF COURSE, FOOL! THE SHADOWS--SOLDIERS OF WARLORD KAA!
KAA!? THE ALIEN SHADOW BEING! I REMEMBER HIM FROM AVENGER FILES!
HE'S ATTACKED EARTH TWICE BEFORE--AND JUST BARELY BEEN DRIVEN OFF!
THAT IS PAST, FOOL! EACH TIME I HAVE COME BACK STRONGER!
THE SECOND TIME, OUR SCIENCE HAD ENABLED ME TO BECOME A SHADOW DUPLICATE OF THE HULK! I DEFEATED HIM, BUT OUR BATTLE HAD CARRIED US INTO A MILITARY BASE, WHERE...
NO! THERE ARE FLOODLIGHTS ALL AROUND US! I'M FADING!
BUT THE LIGHTS HAD NOT BEEN BRIGHT ENOUGH TO DISSIPATE ME ENTIRELY...
AFTER MANY MONTHS I WAS ABLE TO REFORM!
I MANAGED TO CONTACT MY HOME WORLD AND HAVE THEM SEND A SHIP TO RESCUE ME!
I LEFT THIS WORLD VOWING TO RETURN... AND CONQUER!
THIS DAY, I FULFILL THAT OATH. MY PICKED SHADOW WARRIORS AND I HAVE COME TO ESTABLISH THE BEACHHEAD FOR OUR FINAL, ALL-OUT INVASION
WE HAVE DEVELOPED A NEW POWER--THE POWER TO POSSESS HUMANS' MINDS BY INHABITING THEIR SHADOWS!
THIS TIME, NOTHING CAN STOP US!

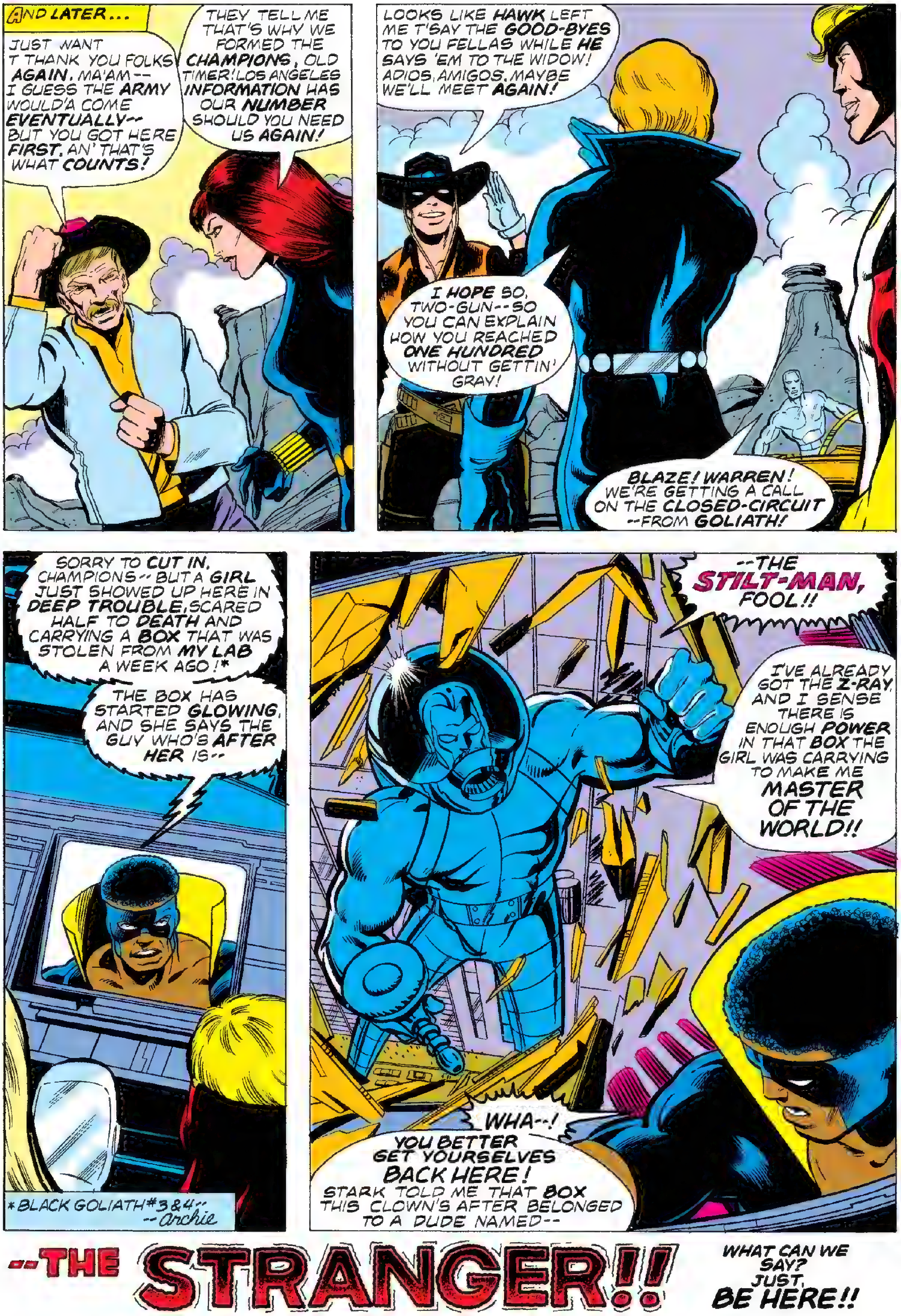

--AND KAA WILL RULE SUPREME!
NO! YOU WILL BE DEFEATED-- BY HELLFIRE!!
WOULD YOU HARM YOUR OWN PEOPLE, HUMAN? I THINK NOT!
AND THEREIN LIES THE KEY TO OUR VICTORY--
--FOR WE WOULD SACRIFICE ALL OUR HUMAN SLAVES TO DEFEAT YOU, AND NEVER RISK ENDANGERING OURSELVES!
HERE IT COMES, GANG! GET READY TO--
YOU SHOULD LEARN TO FINISH A SENTENCE, HAWKEYE! IT'S IMPOLITE TO TO LEAVE A LADY DANGLING!
WIDOW!
HEY, SHE'S NOT HERE ALONE, YOU KNOW!
FOR HAWKEYE SHE IS, WINGS! THEY USED TO KNOW EACH OTHER!
WHAT GETS ME IS NOT EVEN A WORD OF WELCOME FROM SPOOK-STUFF, HERE!
YOU HAVE DONE NOTHING YET WORTHY OF MY NOTICE!
THESE ARE THE RANCHERS THE NEWS REPORT SAID HAD BEEN POSSESSED OF SOME FORM OF MADNESS!
A SIMPLE DARKFIELD SHOULD SUFFICE TO--


BUT, TO THE YOUNG RUSSIAN'S SURPRISE...
SOMETHING--PENETRATES THE FIELD!
FOOLISH FEMALE! HOW CAN DARKNESS SHACKLE BEINGS WHOSE ESSENCE IS DARKNESS!?
AND AS DARKSTAR STARES IN UNCOMPREHENDING HORROR...
THE BEING APPROACHES MY OWN SHADOW! HIS FINGERS REACH FOR IT--
--AND AS HE TOUCHES IT, MY SOUL BEGINS TO SCREAM WITHIN ME!
POWER SUCH AS YOURS WILL SERVE US WELL, WOMAN!
MAYBE, CREEP--AND MAYBE NOT!
WHAT? THE WOMAN'S SHADOW IS GONE! THERE IS NOTHING TO POSSESS!
ICEMAN!!
AH, MY HEART MELTS TO HEAR MY NAME SLIP FROM YOUR LOVELY LIPS, FAIR MAID!
NOW IF YOU'LL JUST STAY BENEATH MY ICE-SHADE, WE'LL FIGURE OUT HOW TO PUT OUR WOULD-BE CONQUERORS ON ICE--IF YOU'LL PARDON THE PUN!
HOW WE'LL DO IT ONLY DA SHADOW KNOWS--NYAH HAH HA!
THOU HAST STRUCK UPON A SOLUTION, YOUNG ONE! IF YON BEINGS CANNOT WORK THEIR EVIL LEST THERE BE LIGHT--
--THEN I SHALL KEEP THEM FROM THE LIGHT BY BURYING THEM BENEATH THIS MOUNTAIN OF STONE!


BUT AS THE MIGHTY OLYMPIAN HEAVES THE MASSIVE WEIGHT ABOVE HIS HEAD...
SMASH US, BRAGGART? IS THAT WHAT YOU HOPED TO DO?
NOW THAT YOUR SHADOW AND YOUR MIND HAVE MERGED WITH MINE, PERHAPS YOU'LL FEEL MORE LIKE SMASHING--
--THE BLACK WIDOW!
THY TIME HAS COME TO DIE!
FIGHT BACK, HERCULES! THEIR HOLD ON YOU CAN'T BE AS STRONG AS THAT THEY ACHIEVE OVER A MORTAL!
HE... IS HESITATING-- AS IF HE BATTLES WITH HIS OWN SOUL!
WIDOW! GET OUT OF THE WAY! HURRY!
NO! HE MUST SEE ME, AND KNOW THAT IF HE LETS THEM POSSESS HIM IT WON'T ONLY BE A FRIEND HE'S DOOMED--BUT PERHAPS A WORLD AS WELL!
IF THE SON OF ZEUS UNDERSTANDS THOSE WORDS, THE ONLY SIGN OF IT IS THE SWEAT THAT BEGINS TO DRIP FROM HIS BROW AND THE KNOTTING OF MIGHTY SINEWS BENEATH HIS SUN-BRONZED SKIN.
GET THEE... FROM ME, DEMON! 'TIS HERCULES THOU DOST FACE--NOT SOME SON OF MAN--
--BUT HERCULES! HE WHO IS CALLED PRINCE OF POWER-- SON OF ZEUS, ALL-SEEING!
AND I WILL NOT SHAME MY BIRTHRIGHT!!
DEPART, VILE SHADOW-- AND POSSESS YON STONE, IF THOU CANST!
AND BEHIND HIM, THE BLACK WIDOW... SMILES.


WHILE, ELSEWHERE...
I HOPE THIS PLAN OF YOURS WORKS, GHOST RIDER!
WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TO GET THIS CLOSE TO THE MOTHER-SHIP, AGAIN!
THEN WE SHOULD BEGIN, HAWKEYE -- ONCE I GRIP YOUR ARROW WITH THE TOUCH OF... HELL FIRE--
--CAUSING IT TO GLOW WITH A LIGHT FROM WHICH NONE MAY HOPE TO HIDE!
WHY DON'T YOU KNOCK OFF THE SPOOK ROUTINE AND GET ON WITH IT! KAA COULD RETURN AND SECOND AND--
KAA IS HERE, FOOLS! AND YOU THREE WILL BE THE FIRST TO DIE!!
N-NOOOO!
CEASE STRUGGLING, HUMAN! KAA NOW INHABITS YOUR SHADOW! YOUR WILL IS MINE!
NO!
I... WON'T LET YOU!
MUST... RESIST!
I DIDN'T SPEND ALL THOSE YEARS WITH PROFESSOR X WITHOUT LEARNING SOMETHING ABOUT CLOSING MY MIND TO OUTSIDERS!
AND, WHILE I MAY NOT BE ANYWHERE NEAR AS GOOD AT IT AS MARVEL GIRL WAS--
--I'M STILL THE AVENGING ANGEL, KAA, AND YOU'VE MESSED WITH THE WRONG CHAMPION!
THE ANGEL SOARS SKYWARD, AND KAA FEELS HIS POWER WANING...
...AS THE SHADOW HE FOOLISHLY DARED POSSESS GROWS SMALLER...
...UNTIL FINALLY IT IS TOO SMALL TO PRESERVE HIS LIFE ESSENCE.
THERE IS A TERRIFIED SHRIEK INSIDE THE ANGEL'S MIND... THEN KAA AND HIS EVIL ARE... GONE!


FLEW TOO-- **HIGH! STRAINED** MY WINGS!
GOT TO **KEEP GOING!** JUST ENOUGH STRENGTH TO **FINISH** THE JOB!
DON'T **STOP,** WINGS! I CAN TELL BY THE WAY YOU'RE **FLUTTERING** THAT WE'RE ONLY GONNA GET **ONE SHOT** AT THIS!
THEN YOU'D BETTER NOT **MISS,** AVENGER!
EX-AVENGER, X-MAN! I WISH YOU PEOPLE WOULD **REMEMBER** THAT!
AND NOW WE'LL FIND OUT WHETHER YOUR RESIDENT **DEMON'S** GOT ROCKS IN HIS **SKULL**--
THWANG!
--OR WHETHER A CRAZY STUNT LIKE THIS'LL WORK!!
THEY HAVE **SLAIN** THE **WARLORD KAA**-- AND THEY ATTACK THE **COMMAND SHIP!**
ALL UNITS **REGROUP!** REACH THEM BEFORE IT IS--
TOO LATE!!
HAWKEYE'S MOST POWERFUL **BLAST ARROW**--IMBUED WITH THE FULL, SEARING BRILLIANCE OF **HELLFIRE--BLOWS THE ALIEN SHIP APART IN A BLINDING FLASH**--
--AND A VIRTUAL **TIDAL** WAVE OF **DEADLY INCANDESCENCE** SWEEPS THROUGH THE SHADOW WARRIORS' **RANKS**-- ENDING THEIR THREAT.


AND LATER...
JUST WANT T THANK YOU FOLKS AGAIN, MA'AM-- I GUESS THE ARMY WOULD'A COME EVENTUALLY-- BUT YOU GOT HERE FIRST, AN' THAT'S WHAT COUNTS!
THEY TELL ME THAT'S WHY WE FORMED THE CHAMPIONS, OLD TIMER! LOS ANGELES INFORMATION HAS OUR NUMBER SHOULD YOU NEED US AGAIN!
LOOKS LIKE HAWK LEFT ME T'SAY THE GOOD-BYES TO YOU FELLAS WHILE HE SAYS 'EM TO THE WIDOW! ADIOS, AMIGOS. MAYBE WE'LL MEET AGAIN!
I HOPE SO, TWO-GUN--SO YOU CAN EXPLAIN HOW YOU REACHED ONE HUNDRED WITHOUT GETTIN' GRAY!
BLAZE! WARREN! WE'RE GETTING A CALL ON THE CLOSED-CIRCUIT --FROM GOLIATH!
SORRY TO CUT IN, CHAMPIONS-- BUT A GIRL JUST SHOWED UP HERE IN DEEP TROUBLE, SCARED HALF TO DEATH AND CARRYING A BOX THAT WAS STOLEN FROM MY LAB A WEEK AGO!*
THE BOX HAS STARTED GLOWING, AND SHE SAYS THE GUY WHO'S AFTER HER IS--
*BLACK GOLIATH #3 & 4-- --Archie
--THE STILT-MAN, FOOL!!
I'VE ALREADY GOT THE Z-RAY, AND I SENSE THERE IS ENOUGH POWER IN THAT BOX THE GIRL WAS CARRYING TO MAKE ME MASTER OF THE WORLD!!
WHA--!
YOU BETTER GET YOURSELVES BACK HERE! STARK TOLD ME THAT BOX THIS CLOWN'S AFTER BELONGED TO A DUDE NAMED--
--THE STRANGER!!
WHAT CAN WE SAY? JUST, BE HERE!!

THE CHAMPIONS
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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
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FALL, OLYMPIAN! NEITHER HUMAN NOR DEMI-GOD CAN STAND BEFORE THE MIGHT OF THE SOUL-GEM!!
FROM BEYOND THE STARS... THE STRANGER STRIKES!
Cockrum

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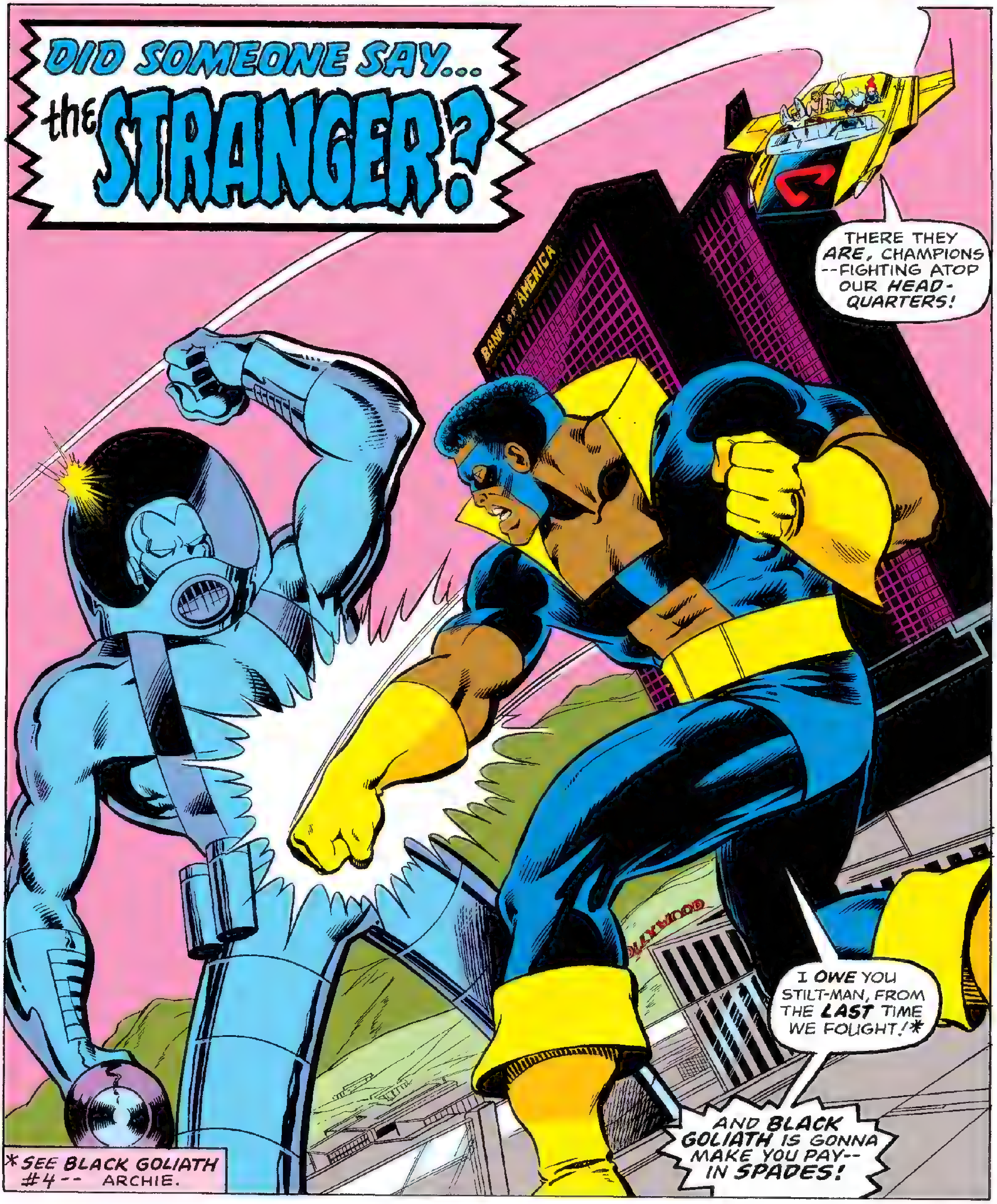
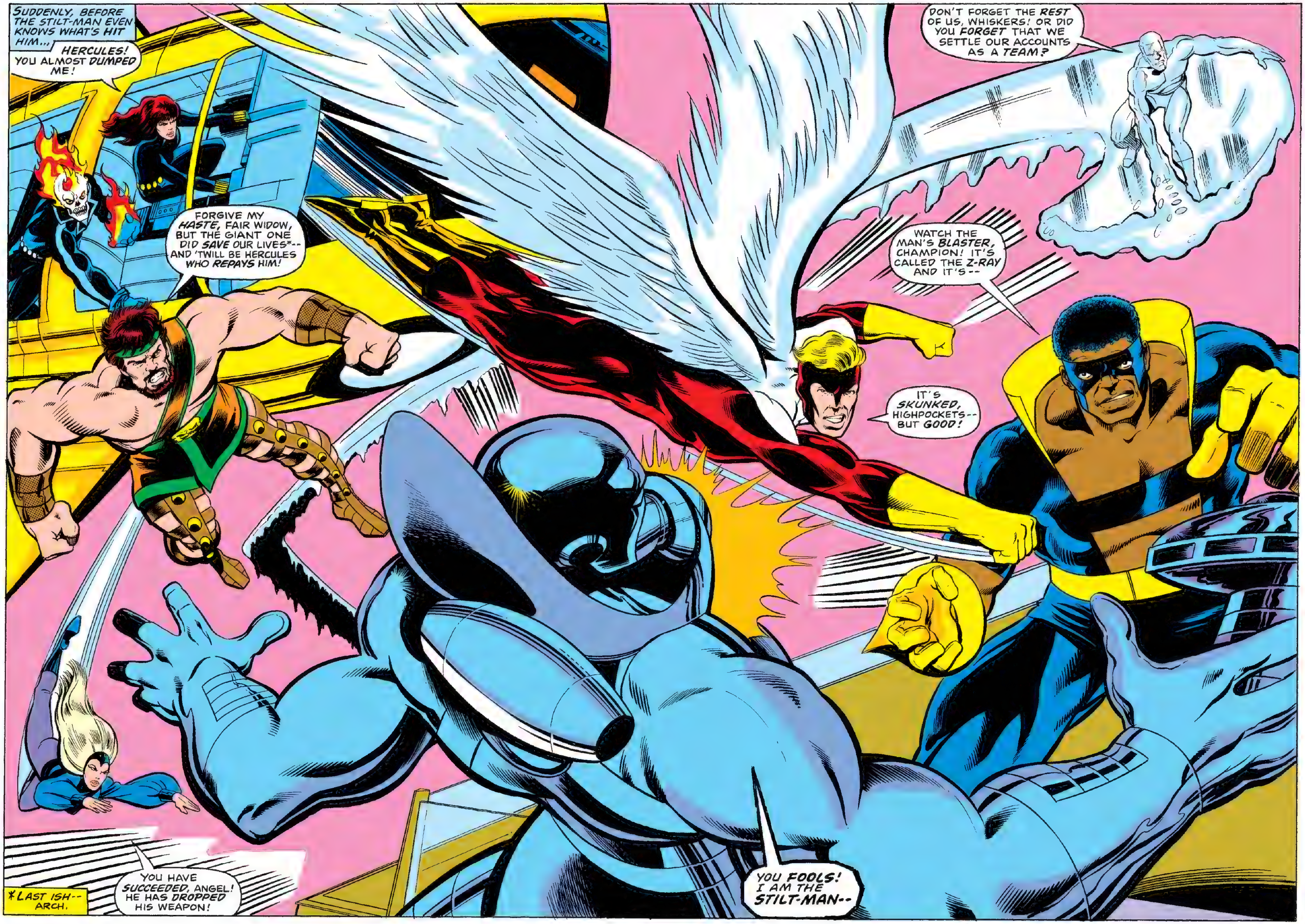
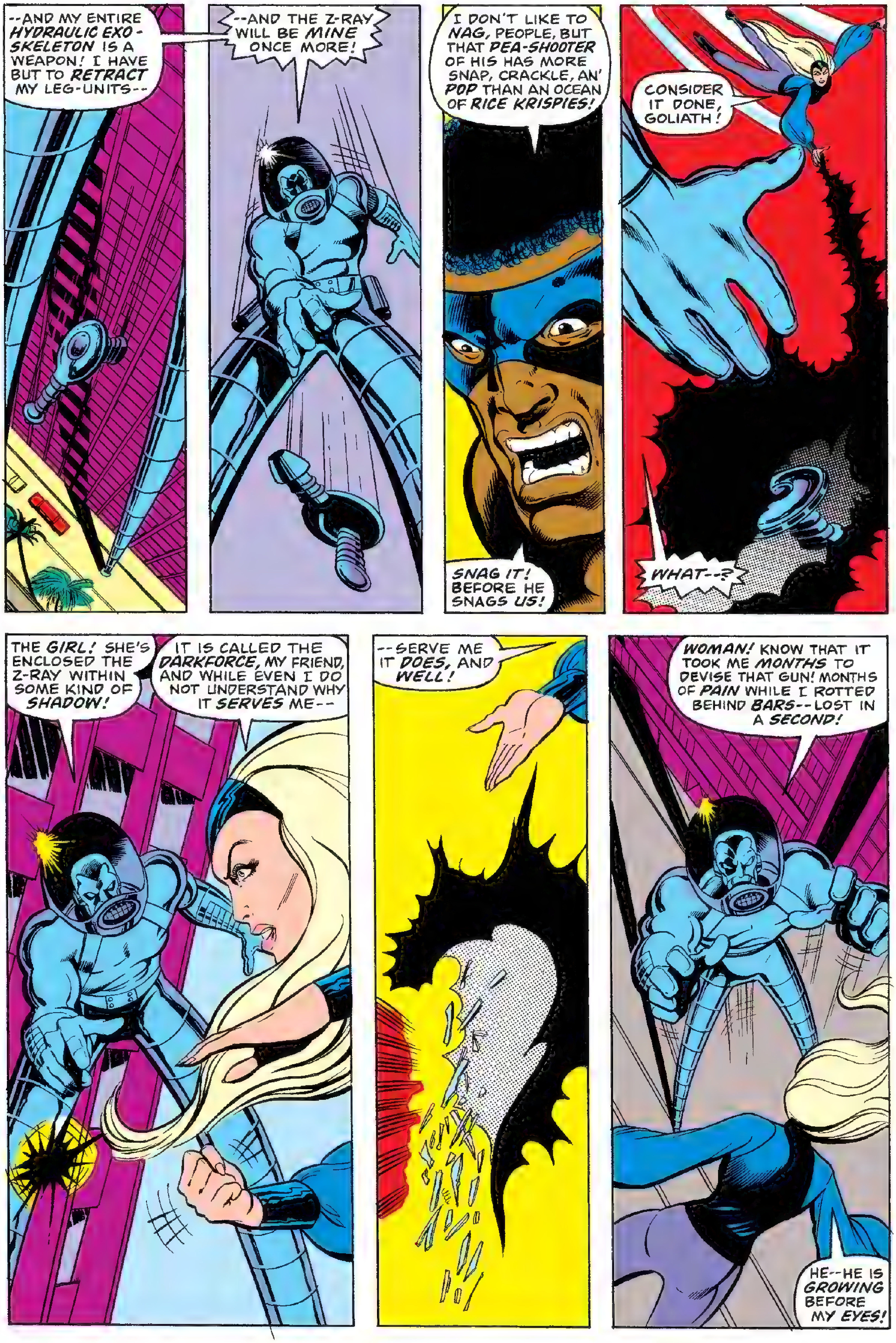
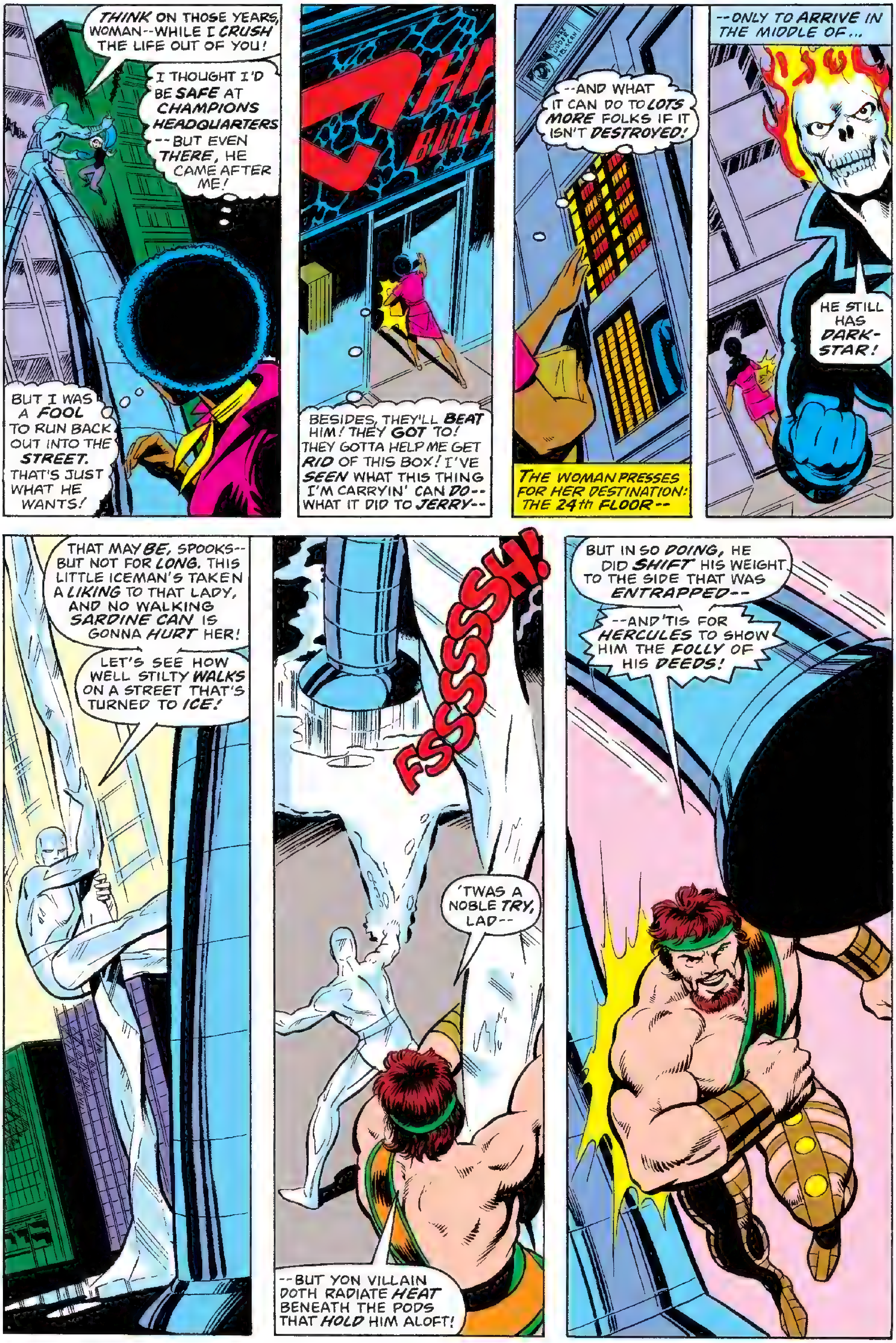
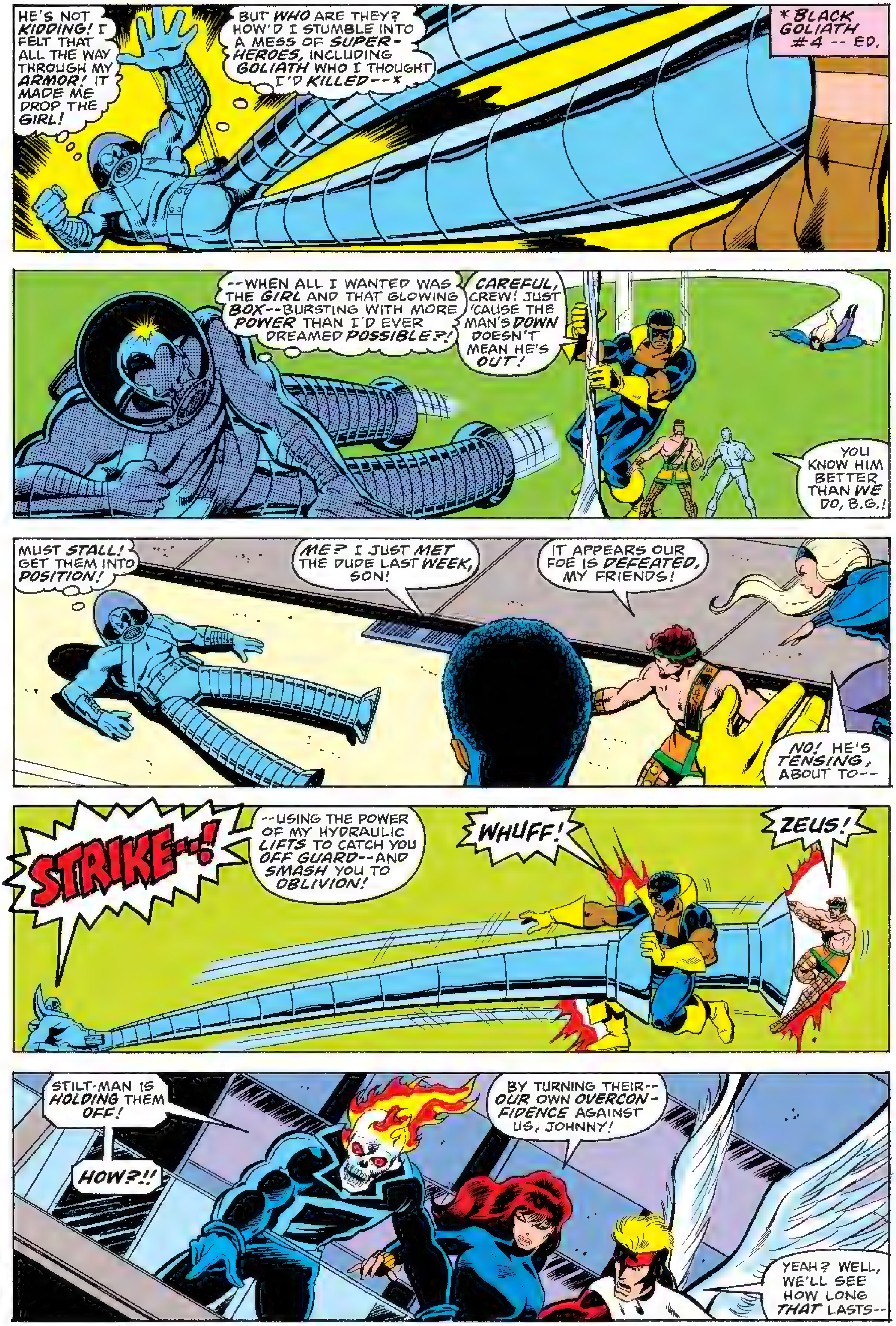

DID SOMEONE SAY... the STRANGER?
THERE THEY ARE, CHAMPIONS --FIGHTING ATOP OUR HEAD-QUARTERS!
BANK OF AMERICA
HOLLYWOOD
I OWE YOU STILT-MAN, FROM THE LAST TIME WE FOUGHT!*
AND BLACK GOLIATH IS GONNA MAKE YOU PAY-- IN SPADES!

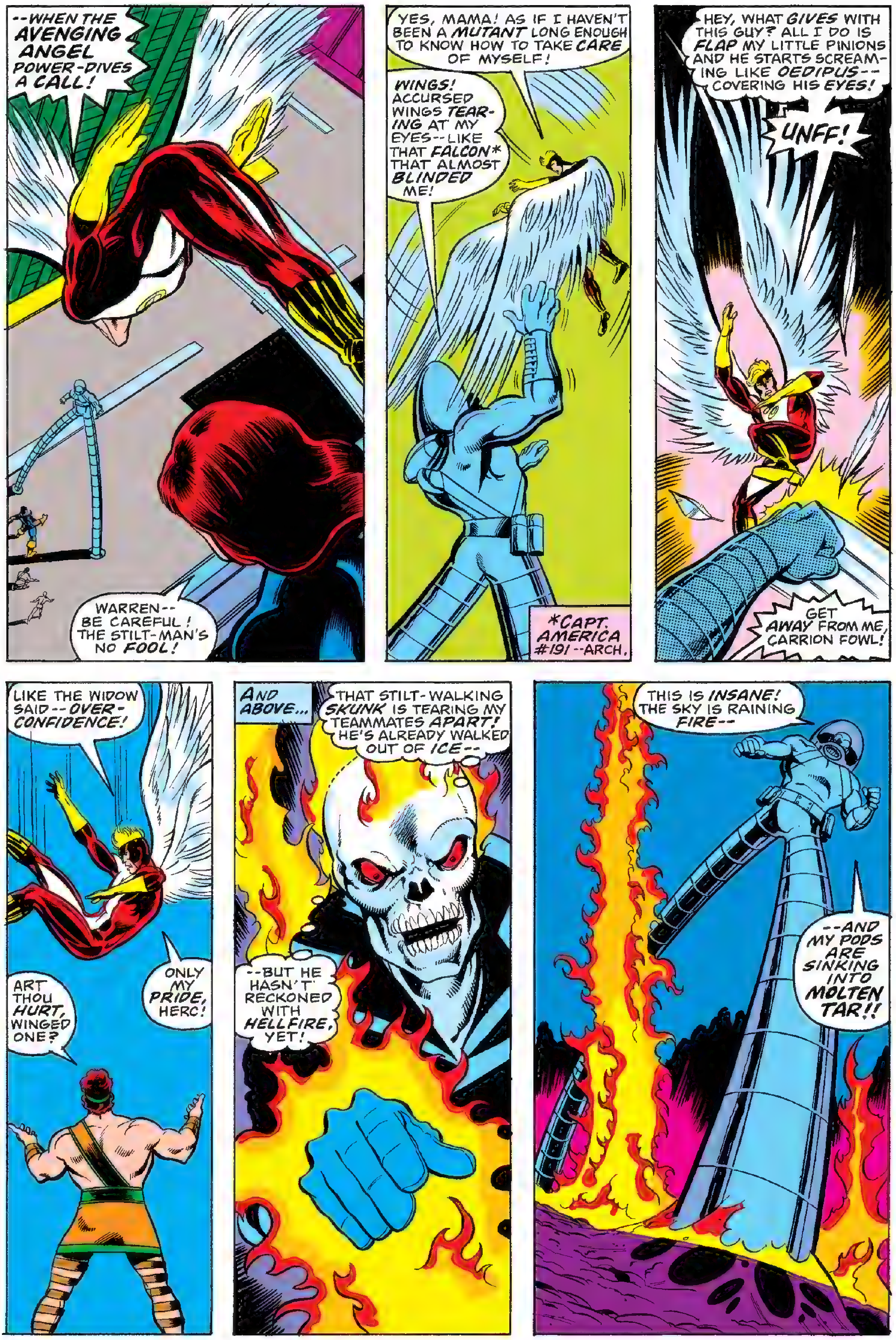
*SEE BLACK GOLIATH #4 -- ARCHIE.

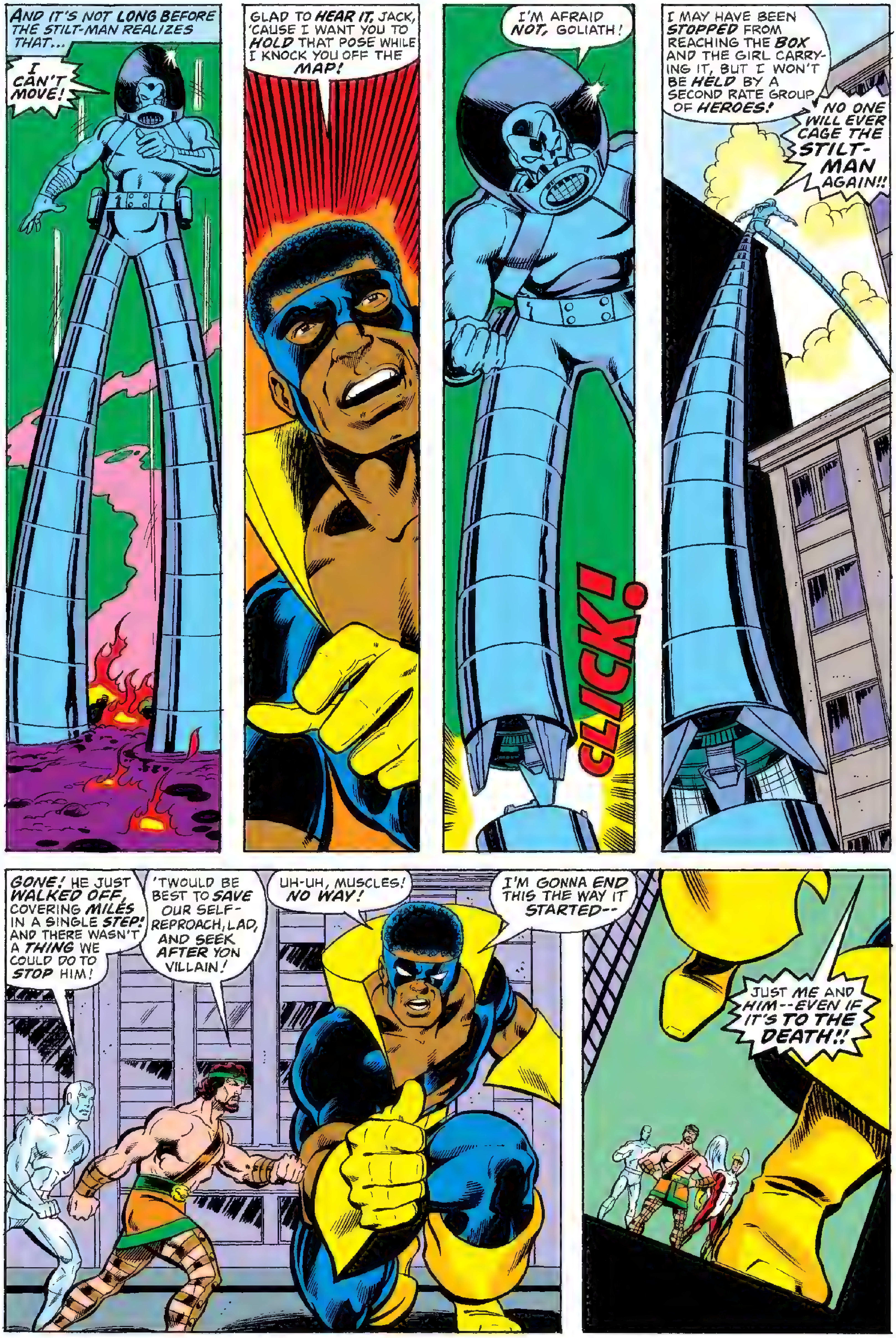

SUDDENLY, BEFORE THE STILT-MAN EVEN KNOWS WHAT'S *HIT* HIM...
HERCULES! YOU ALMOST *DUMPED* ME!
FORGIVE MY *HASTE,* FAIR WIDOW, BUT THE GIANT ONE DID *SAVE* OUR LIVES*-- AND 'TWILL BE HERCULES *WHO REPAYS* HIM!
DON'T FORGET THE *REST* OF US, WHISKERS! OR DID YOU *FORGET* THAT WE SETTLE OUR ACCOUNTS AS A *TEAM?*
WATCH THE MAN'S *BLASTER,* CHAMPION! IT'S CALLED THE *Z-RAY* AND IT'S--
IT'S *SKUNKED,* HIGHPOCKETS-- BUT *GOOD!*
YOU HAVE *SUCCEEDED,* ANGEL! HE HAS *DROPPED* HIS WEAPON!
*YOU **FOOLS!** I AM THE **STILT-MAN**--*
*LAST ISH-- ARCH.

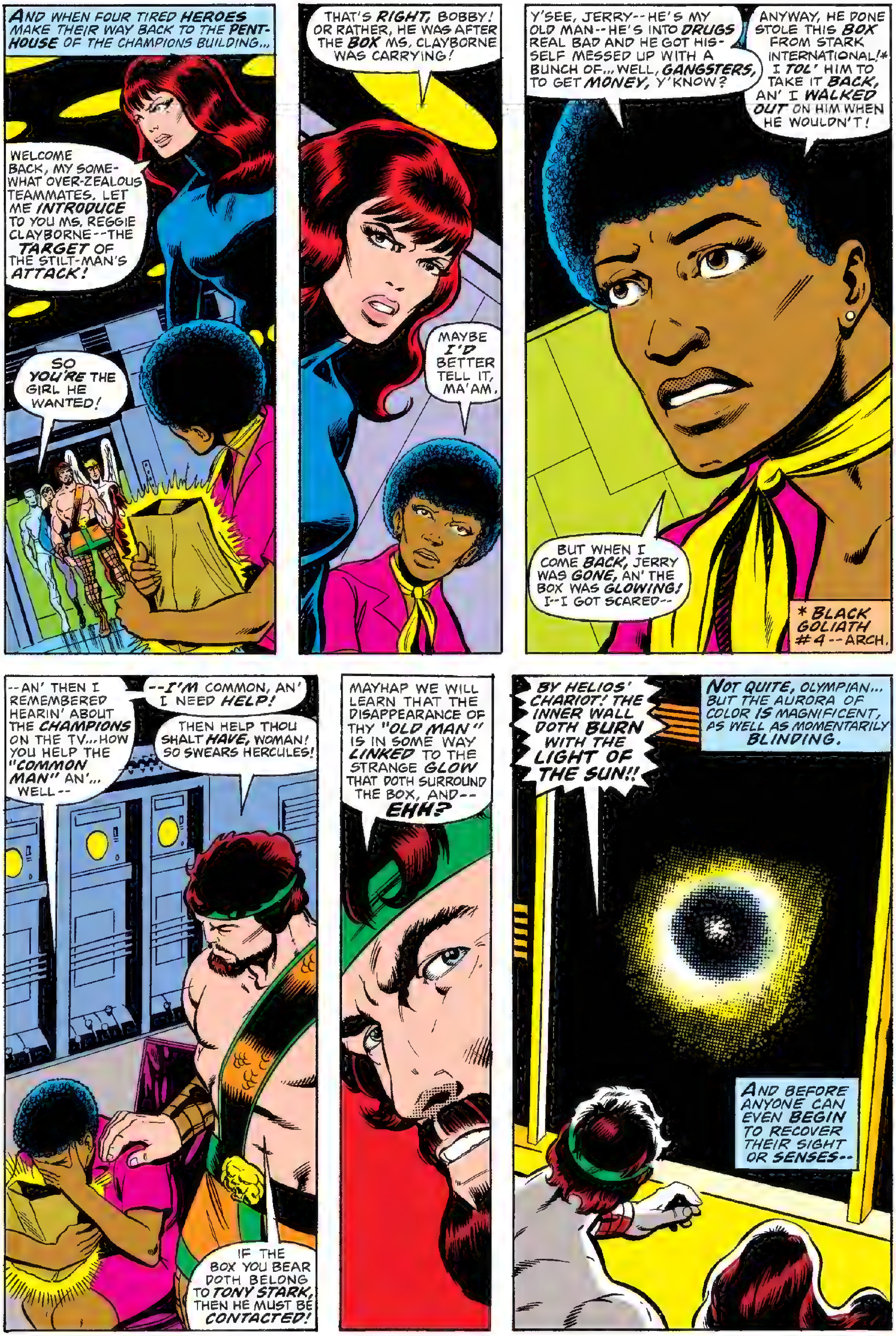

--AND MY ENTIRE *HYDRAULIC EXO-SKELETON* IS A WEAPON! I HAVE BUT TO *RETRACT* MY LEG-UNITS--
--AND THE Z-RAY WILL BE *MINE* ONCE MORE!
I DON'T LIKE TO *NAG*, PEOPLE, BUT THAT *PEA-SHOOTER* OF HIS HAS MORE SNAP, CRACKLE, AN' *POP* THAN AN OCEAN OF *RICE KRISPIES!*
SNAG IT! BEFORE HE SNAGS *US!*
CONSIDER IT DONE, GOLIATH!
WHAT--?
THE *GIRL!* SHE'S ENCLOSED THE Z-RAY WITHIN SOME KIND OF *SHADOW!*
IT IS CALLED THE *DARKFORCE*, MY FRIEND, AND WHILE EVEN I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY IT *SERVES* ME--
--SERVE ME IT *DOES*, AND *WELL!*
WOMAN! KNOW THAT IT TOOK ME *MONTHS* TO DEVISE THAT GUN! MONTHS OF *PAIN* WHILE I ROTTED BEHIND *BARS*--LOST IN A *SECOND!*
HE--HE IS *GROWING* BEFORE MY *EYES!*

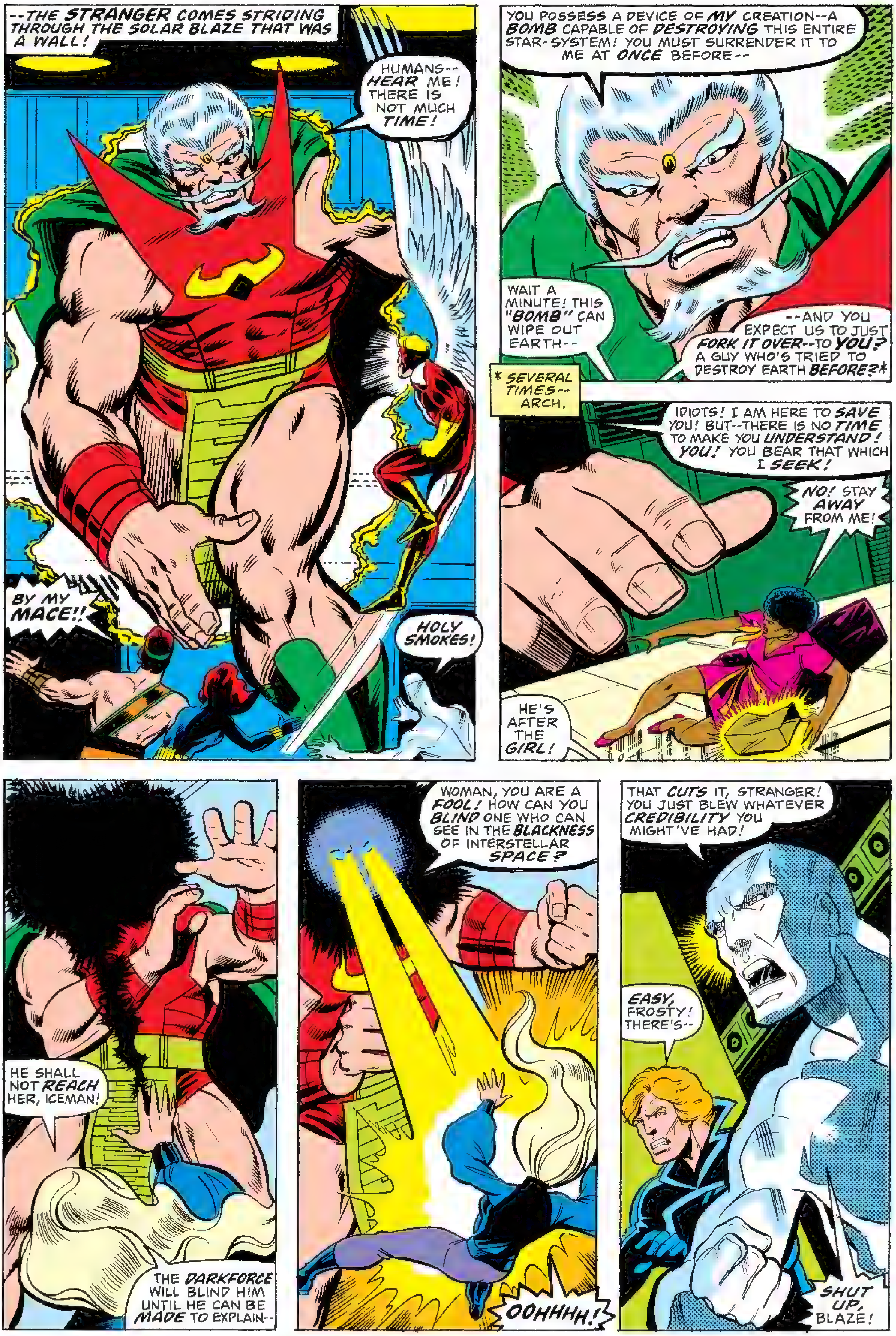

THINK ON THOSE YEARS, WOMAN--WHILE I CRUSH THE LIFE OUT OF YOU!
I THOUGHT I'D BE SAFE AT CHAMPIONS HEADQUARTERS --BUT EVEN THERE, HE CAME AFTER ME!
BUT I WAS A FOOL TO RUN BACK OUT INTO THE STREET. THAT'S JUST WHAT HE WANTS!
BESIDES, THEY'LL BEAT HIM! THEY GOT TO! THEY GOTTA HELP ME GET RID OF THIS BOX! I'VE SEEN WHAT THIS THING I'M CARRYIN' CAN DO-- WHAT IT DID TO JERRY--
--AND WHAT IT CAN DO TO LOTS MORE FOLKS IF IT ISN'T DESTROYED!
THE WOMAN PRESSES FOR HER DESTINATION: THE 24th FLOOR--
--ONLY TO ARRIVE IN THE MIDDLE OF...
HE STILL HAS DARK-STAR!
THAT MAY BE, SPOOKS-- BUT NOT FOR LONG. THIS LITTLE ICEMAN'S TAKEN A LIKING TO THAT LADY, AND NO WALKING SARDINE CAN IS GONNA HURT HER!
LET'S SEE HOW WELL STILTY WALKS ON A STREET THAT'S TURNED TO ICE!
FSSSSSH!
'TWAS A NOBLE TRY, LAD--
--BUT YON VILLAIN DOTH RADIATE HEAT BENEATH THE PODS THAT HOLD HIM ALOFT!
BUT IN SO DOING, HE DID SHIFT HIS WEIGHT TO THE SIDE THAT WAS ENTRAPPED--
--AND 'TIS FOR HERCULES TO SHOW HIM THE FOLLY OF HIS DEEDS!

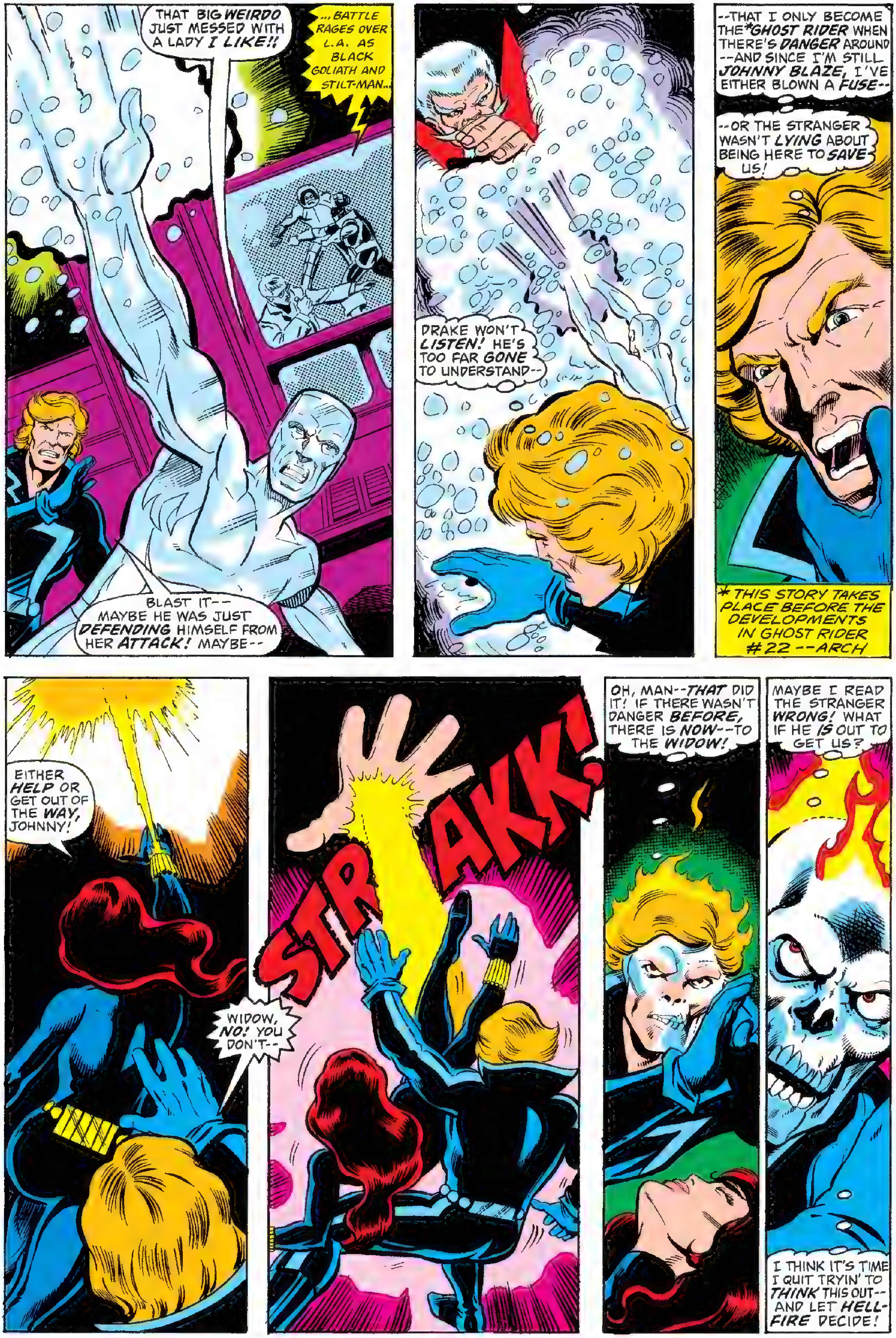

HE'S NOT KIDDING! I FELT THAT ALL THE WAY THROUGH MY ARMOR! IT MADE ME DROP THE GIRL!
BUT WHO ARE THEY? HOW'D I STUMBLE INTO A MESS OF SUPER-HEROES, INCLUDING GOLIATH WHO I THOUGHT I'D KILLED--*
* BLACK GOLIATH #4 -- ED.
--WHEN ALL I WANTED WAS THE GIRL AND THAT GLOWING BOX--BURSTING WITH MORE POWER THAN I'D EVER DREAMED POSSIBLE?!
CAREFUL, CREW! JUST 'CAUSE THE MAN'S DOWN DOESN'T MEAN HE'S OUT!
YOU KNOW HIM BETTER THAN WE DO, B.G.!
MUST STALL! GET THEM INTO POSITION!
ME? I JUST MET THE DUDE LAST WEEK, SON!
IT APPEARS OUR FOE IS DEFEATED, MY FRIENDS!
NO! HE'S TENSING, ABOUT TO--
STRIKE--!
--USING THE POWER OF MY HYDRAULIC LIFTS TO CATCH YOU OFF GUARD--AND SMASH YOU TO OBLIVION!
WHUFF!
ZEUS!
STILT-MAN IS HOLDING THEM OFF!
HOW?!!
BY TURNING THEIR--OUR OWN OVERCONFIDENCE AGAINST US, JOHNNY!
YEAH? WELL, WE'LL SEE HOW LONG THAT LASTS--

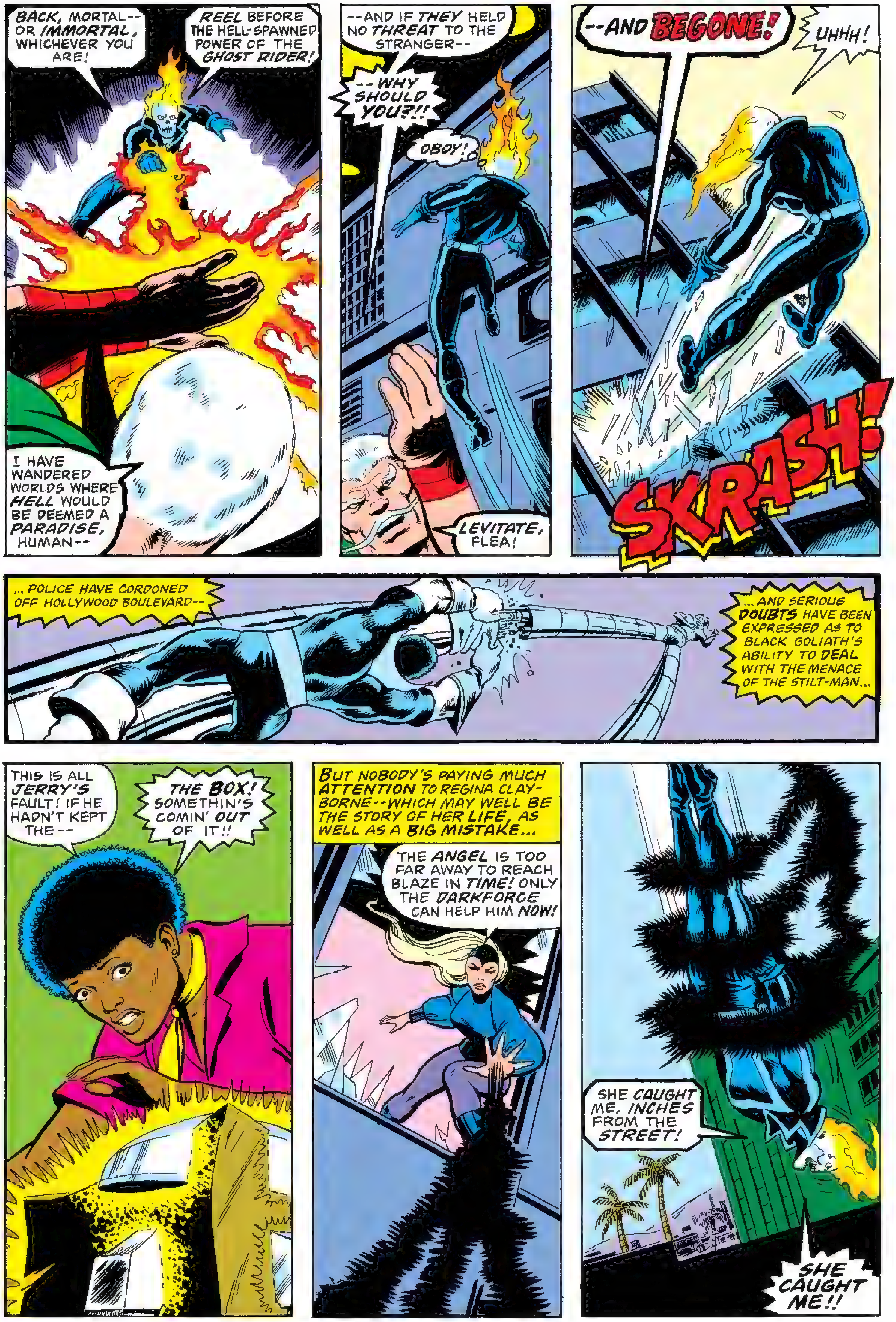

--WHEN THE AVENGING ANGEL POWER-DIVES A CALL!
WARREN-- BE CAREFUL! THE STILT-MAN'S NO FOOL!
YES, MAMA! AS IF I HAVEN'T BEEN A MUTANT LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!
WINGS! ACCURSED WINGS TEARING AT MY EYES--LIKE THAT FALCON* THAT ALMOST BLINDED ME!
*CAPT. AMERICA #191 --ARCH.
HEY, WHAT GIVES WITH THIS GUY? ALL I DO IS FLAP MY LITTLE PINIONS AND HE STARTS SCREAMING LIKE OEDIPUS--COVERING HIS EYES!
UNFF!
GET AWAY FROM ME, CARRION FOWL!
LIKE THE WIDOW SAID--OVER-CONFIDENCE!
ART THOU HURT, WINGED ONE?
ONLY MY PRIDE, HERC!
AND ABOVE...
THAT STILT-WALKING SKUNK IS TEARING MY TEAMMATES APART! HE'S ALREADY WALKED OUT OF ICE--
--BUT HE HASN'T RECKONED WITH HELLFIRE, YET!
THIS IS INSANE! THE SKY IS RAINING FIRE--
--AND MY PODS ARE SINKING INTO MOLTEN TAR!!

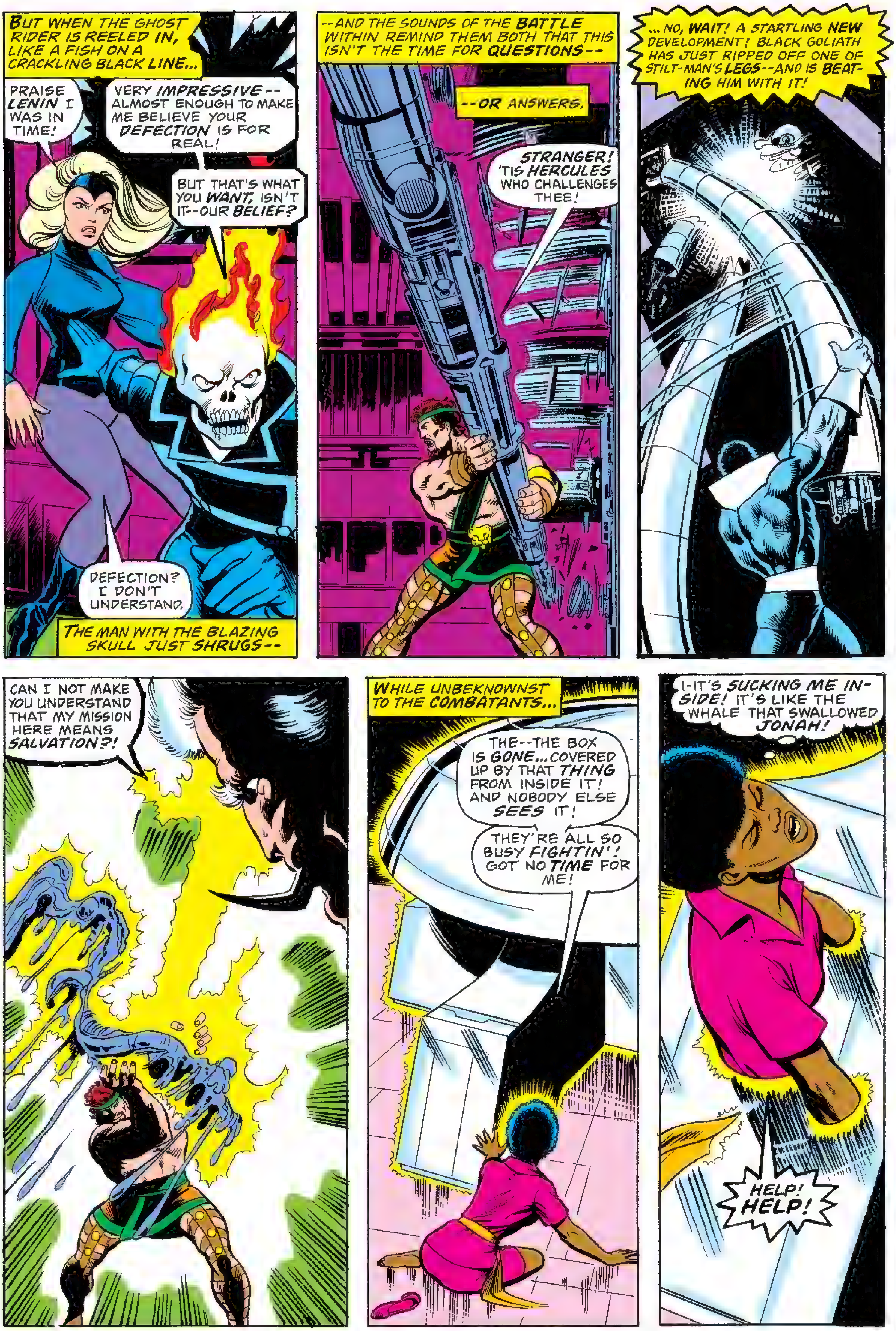

AND IT'S NOT LONG BEFORE THE STILT-MAN REALIZES THAT...
I CAN'T MOVE!
GLAD TO HEAR IT, JACK, 'CAUSE I WANT YOU TO HOLD THAT POSE WHILE I KNOCK YOU OFF THE MAP!
I'M AFRAID NOT, GOLIATH!
CLICK!
I MAY HAVE BEEN STOPPED FROM REACHING THE BOX AND THE GIRL CARRYING IT, BUT I WON'T BE HELD BY A SECOND RATE GROUP OF HEROES!
NO ONE WILL EVER CAGE THE STILT-MAN AGAIN!!
GONE! HE JUST WALKED OFF, COVERING MILES IN A SINGLE STEP! AND THERE WASN'T A THING WE COULD DO TO STOP HIM!
'TWOULD BE BEST TO SAVE OUR SELF-REPROACH, LAD, AND SEEK AFTER YON VILLAIN!
UH-UH, MUSCLES! NO WAY!
I'M GONNA END THIS THE WAY IT STARTED--
JUST ME AND HIM--EVEN IF IT'S TO THE DEATH!!

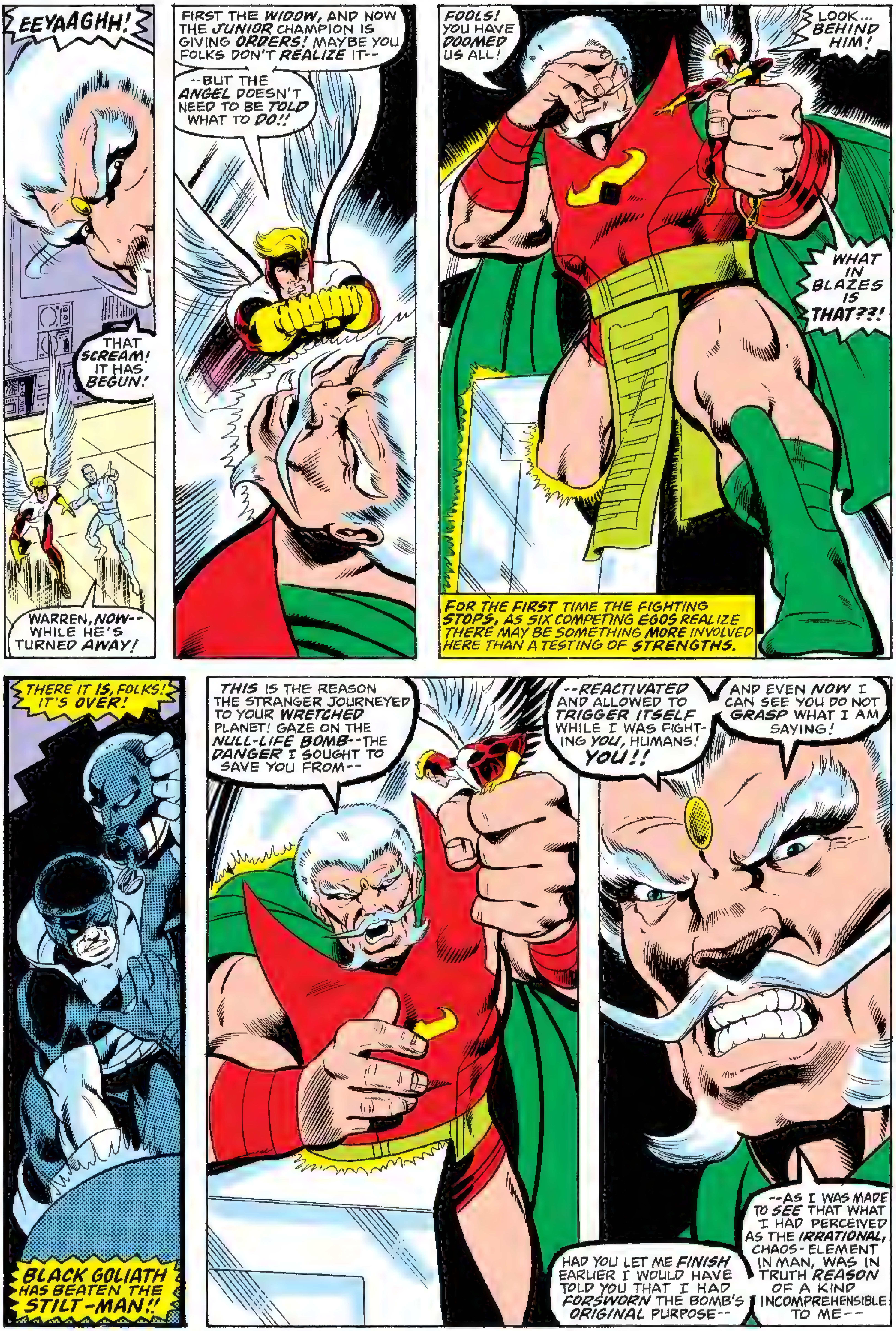

AND WHEN FOUR TIRED HEROES MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE PENTHOUSE OF THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING...
WELCOME BACK, MY SOMEWHAT OVER-ZEALOUS TEAMMATES. LET ME INTRODUCE TO YOU MS. REGGIE CLAYBORNE--THE TARGET OF THE STILT-MAN'S ATTACK!
SO YOU'RE THE GIRL HE WANTED!
THAT'S RIGHT, BOBBY! OR RATHER, HE WAS AFTER THE BOX MS. CLAYBORNE WAS CARRYING!
MAYBE I'D BETTER TELL IT, MA'AM.
Y'SEE, JERRY--HE'S MY OLD MAN--HE'S INTO DRUGS REAL BAD AND HE GOT HISSELF MESSED UP WITH A BUNCH OF... WELL, GANGSTERS, TO GET MONEY, Y'KNOW?
ANYWAY, HE DONE STOLE THIS BOX FROM STARK INTERNATIONAL!* I TOL' HIM TO TAKE IT BACK, AN' I WALKED OUT ON HIM WHEN HE WOULDN'T!
BUT WHEN I COME BACK, JERRY WAS GONE, AN' THE BOX WAS GLOWING! I--I GOT SCARED--
* BLACK GOLIATH #4--ARCH.
--AN' THEN I REMEMBERED HEARIN' ABOUT THE CHAMPIONS ON THE TV... HOW YOU HELP THE "COMMON MAN" AN'... WELL--
--I'M COMMON, AN' I NEED HELP!
THEN HELP THOU SHALT HAVE, WOMAN! SO SWEARS HERCULES!
IF THE BOX YOU BEAR DOTH BELONG TO TONY STARK, THEN HE MUST BE CONTACTED!
MAYHAP WE WILL LEARN THAT THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THY "OLD MAN" IS IN SOME WAY LINKED TO THE STRANGE GLOW THAT DOTH SURROUND THE BOX, AND-- EHH?
BY HELIOS' CHARIOT! THE INNER WALL DOTH BURN WITH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN!!
NOT QUITE, OLYMPIAN... BUT THE AURORA OF COLOR IS MAGNIFICENT, AS WELL AS MOMENTARILY BLINDING.
AND BEFORE ANYONE CAN EVEN BEGIN TO RECOVER THEIR SIGHT OR SENSES--

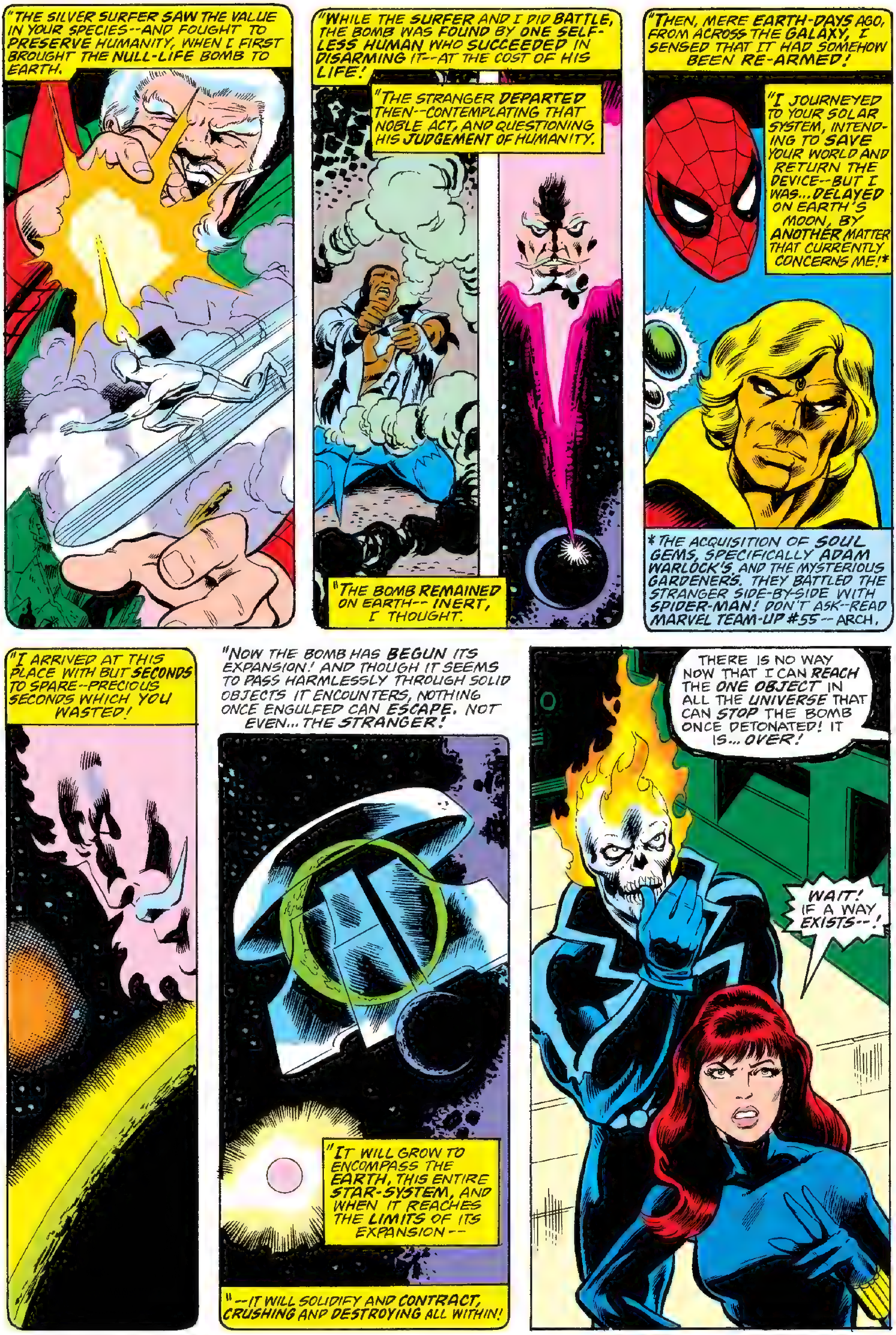

--THE STRANGER COMES STRIDING THROUGH THE SOLAR BLAZE THAT WAS A WALL!
HUMANS-- HEAR ME! THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME!
BY MY MACE!!
HOLY SMOKES!
YOU POSSESS A DEVICE OF MY CREATION--A BOMB CAPABLE OF DESTROYING THIS ENTIRE STAR-SYSTEM! YOU MUST SURRENDER IT TO ME AT ONCE BEFORE--
WAIT A MINUTE! THIS "BOMB" CAN WIPE OUT EARTH--
--AND YOU EXPECT US TO JUST FORK IT OVER--TO YOU? A GUY WHO'S TRIED TO DESTROY EARTH BEFORE?*
* SEVERAL TIMES-- ARCH.
IDIOTS! I AM HERE TO SAVE YOU! BUT--THERE IS NO TIME TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND! YOU! YOU BEAR THAT WHICH I SEEK!
NO! STAY AWAY FROM ME!
HE'S AFTER THE GIRL!
HE SHALL NOT REACH HER, ICEMAN!
THE DARKFORCE WILL BLIND HIM UNTIL HE CAN BE MADE TO EXPLAIN--
WOMAN, YOU ARE A FOOL! HOW CAN YOU BLIND ONE WHO CAN SEE IN THE BLACKNESS OF INTERSTELLAR SPACE?
OOHHHH!
THAT CUTS IT, STRANGER! YOU JUST BLEW WHATEVER CREDIBILITY YOU MIGHT'VE HAD!
EASY, FROSTY! THERE'S--
SHUT UP, BLAZE!

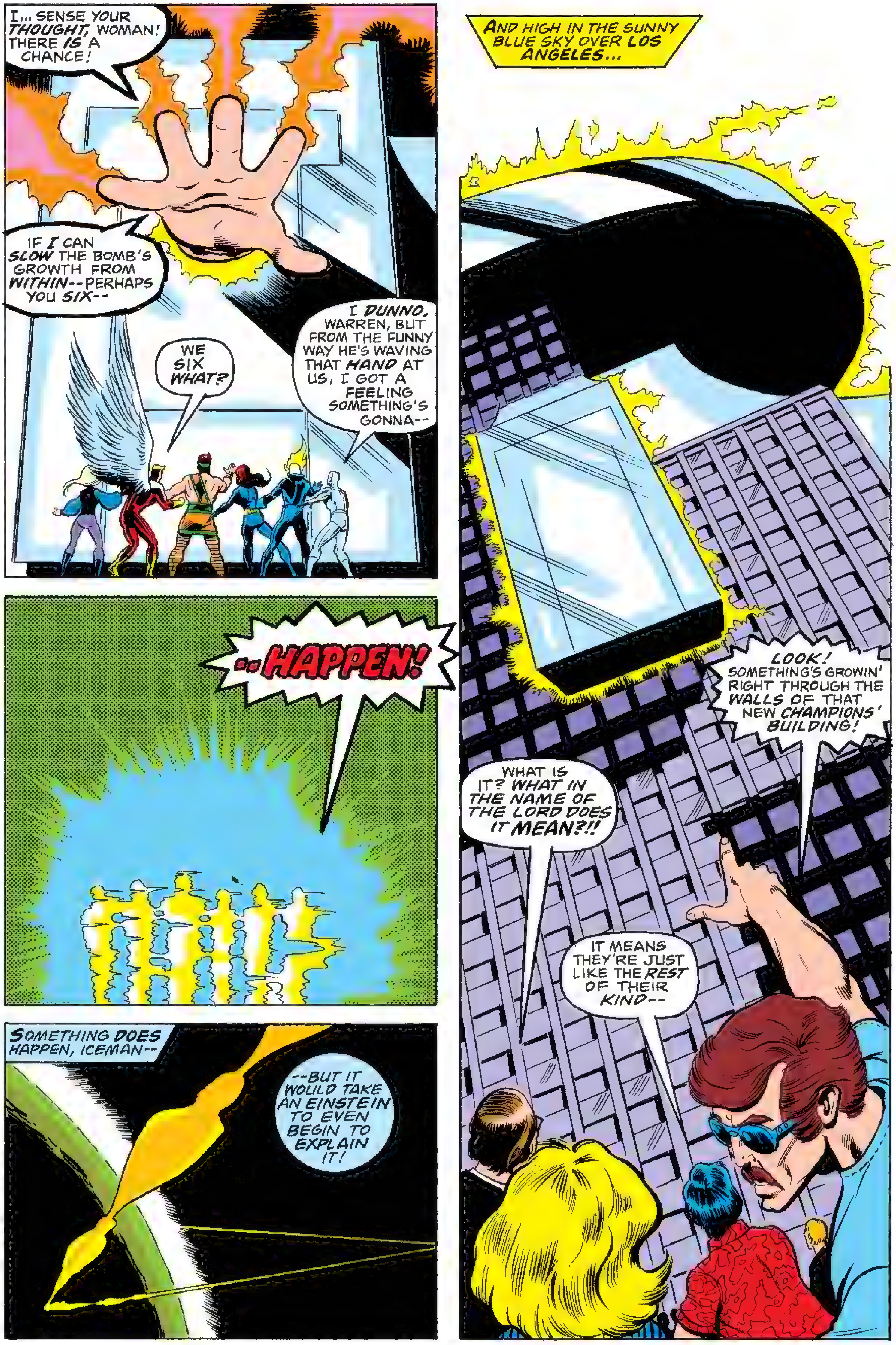

THAT BIG WEIRDO JUST MESSED WITH A LADY I LIKE!!
...BATTLE RAGES OVER L.A. AS BLACK GOLIATH AND STILT-MAN...
BLAST IT-- MAYBE HE WAS JUST DEFENDING HIMSELF FROM HER ATTACK! MAYBE--
DRAKE WON'T LISTEN! HE'S TOO FAR GONE TO UNDERSTAND--
--THAT I ONLY BECOME THE*GHOST RIDER WHEN THERE'S DANGER AROUND --AND SINCE I'M STILL JOHNNY BLAZE, I'VE EITHER BLOWN A FUSE--
--OR THE STRANGER WASN'T LYING ABOUT BEING HERE TO SAVE US!
*THIS STORY TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENTS IN GHOST RIDER #22 --ARCH
EITHER HELP OR GET OUT OF THE WAY, JOHNNY!
WIDOW, NO! YOU DON'T--
STRAKK!
OH, MAN--THAT DID IT! IF THERE WASN'T DANGER BEFORE, THERE IS NOW--TO THE WIDOW!
MAYBE I READ THE STRANGER WRONG! WHAT IF HE IS OUT TO GET US?
I THINK IT'S TIME I QUIT TRYIN' TO THINK THIS OUT-- AND LET HELL-FIRE DECIDE!

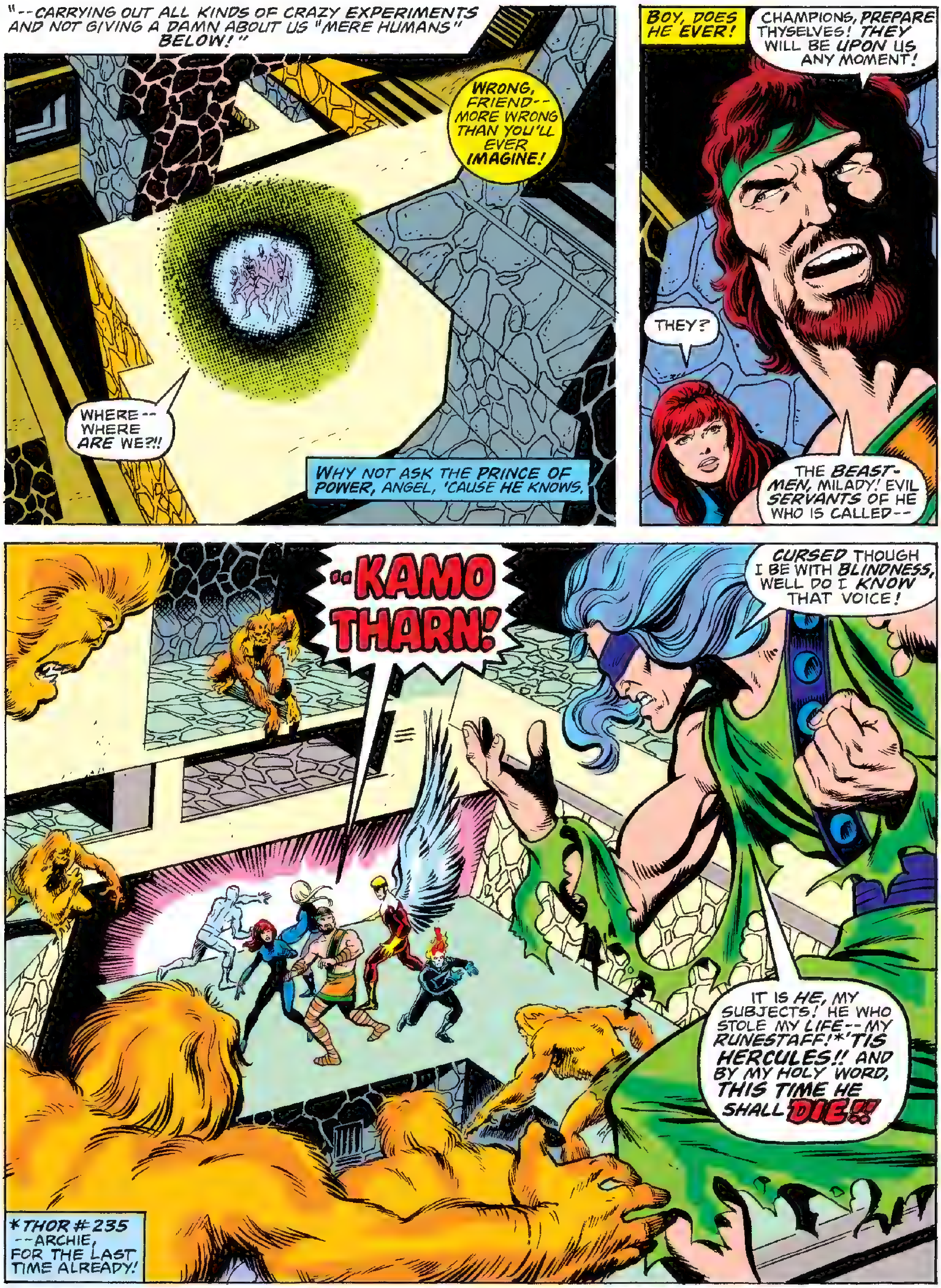

BACK, MORTAL-- OR *IMMORTAL*, WHICHEVER YOU ARE!
REEL BEFORE THE HELL-SPAWNED POWER OF THE *GHOST RIDER!*
I HAVE WANDERED WORLDS WHERE *HELL* WOULD BE DEEMED A *PARADISE*, HUMAN--
--AND IF *THEY* HELD NO *THREAT* TO THE STRANGER--
--WHY SHOULD YOU?!!
OBOY!
LEVITATE, FLEA!
--AND BEGONE!
UHHH!
SKRASH!
...POLICE HAVE CORDONED OFF HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD--
...AND SERIOUS *DOUBTS* HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED AS TO BLACK GOLIATH'S ABILITY TO *DEAL* WITH THE MENACE OF THE STILT-MAN...
THIS IS ALL *JERRY'S* FAULT! IF HE HADN'T KEPT THE--
THE BOX! SOMETHIN'S COMIN' *OUT* OF IT!!
BUT NOBODY'S PAYING MUCH *ATTENTION* TO REGINA CLAYBORNE--WHICH MAY WELL BE THE STORY OF HER *LIFE*, AS WELL AS A *BIG MISTAKE*...
THE *ANGEL* IS TOO FAR AWAY TO REACH BLAZE IN *TIME!* ONLY THE *DARKFORCE* CAN HELP HIM *NOW!*
SHE *CAUGHT* ME, *INCHES* FROM THE *STREET!*
SHE CAUGHT ME!!


BUT WHEN THE GHOST RIDER IS REELED IN, LIKE A FISH ON A CRACKLING BLACK LINE...
PRAISE LENIN I WAS IN TIME!
VERY IMPRESSIVE--ALMOST ENOUGH TO MAKE ME BELIEVE YOUR DEFECTION IS FOR REAL!
BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT, ISN'T IT--OUR BELIEF?
DEFECTION? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
THE MAN WITH THE BLAZING SKULL JUST SHRUGS--
--AND THE SOUNDS OF THE BATTLE WITHIN REMIND THEM BOTH THAT THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS--
--OR ANSWERS.
STRANGER! 'TIS HERCULES WHO CHALLENGES THEE!
...NO, WAIT! A STARTLING NEW DEVELOPMENT! BLACK GOLIATH HAS JUST RIPPED OFF ONE OF STILT-MAN'S LEGS--AND IS BEATING HIM WITH IT!
CAN I NOT MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT MY MISSION HERE MEANS SALVATION?!
WHILE UNBEKNOWNST TO THE COMBATANTS...
THE--THE BOX IS GONE...COVERED UP BY THAT THING FROM INSIDE IT! AND NOBODY ELSE SEES IT!
THEY'RE ALL SO BUSY FIGHTIN'! GOT NO TIME FOR ME!
I-IT'S SUCKING ME INSIDE! IT'S LIKE THE WHALE THAT SWALLOWED JONAH!
HELP! HELP!


EEYAAGHH!
THAT SCREAM! IT HAS BEGUN!
WARREN, NOW-- WHILE HE'S TURNED AWAY!
FIRST THE WIDOW, AND NOW THE JUNIOR CHAMPION IS GIVING ORDERS! MAYBE YOU FOLKS DON'T REALIZE IT--
--BUT THE ANGEL DOESN'T NEED TO BE TOLD WHAT TO DO!!
FOOLS! YOU HAVE DOOMED US ALL!
LOOK... BEHIND HIM!
WHAT IN BLAZES IS THAT??!
FOR THE FIRST TIME THE FIGHTING STOPS, AS SIX COMPETING EGOS REALIZE THERE MAY BE SOMETHING MORE INVOLVED HERE THAN A TESTING OF STRENGTHS.
THERE IT IS, FOLKS! IT'S OVER!
BLACK GOLIATH HAS BEATEN THE STILT-MAN!!
THIS IS THE REASON THE STRANGER JOURNEYED TO YOUR WRETCHED PLANET! GAZE ON THE NULL-LIFE BOMB--THE DANGER I SOUGHT TO SAVE YOU FROM--
--REACTIVATED AND ALLOWED TO TRIGGER ITSELF WHILE I WAS FIGHTING YOU, HUMANS! YOU!!
AND EVEN NOW I CAN SEE YOU DO NOT GRASP WHAT I AM SAYING!
HAD YOU LET ME FINISH EARLIER I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU THAT I HAD FORSWORN THE BOMB'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE--
--AS I WAS MADE TO SEE THAT WHAT I HAD PERCEIVED AS THE IRRATIONAL, CHAOS-ELEMENT IN MAN, WAS IN TRUTH REASON OF A KIND INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO ME--


"THE SILVER SURFER SAW THE VALUE IN YOUR SPECIES--AND FOUGHT TO PRESERVE HUMANITY, WHEN I FIRST BROUGHT THE NULL-LIFE BOMB TO EARTH.
"WHILE THE SURFER AND I DID BATTLE, THE BOMB WAS FOUND BY ONE SELF-LESS HUMAN WHO SUCCEEDED IN DISARMING IT--AT THE COST OF HIS LIFE!
"THE STRANGER DEPARTED THEN--CONTEMPLATING THAT NOBLE ACT, AND QUESTIONING HIS JUDGEMENT OF HUMANITY.
"THE BOMB REMAINED ON EARTH-- INERT, I THOUGHT.
"THEN, MERE EARTH-DAYS AGO, FROM ACROSS THE GALAXY, I SENSED THAT IT HAD SOMEHOW BEEN RE-ARMED!
"I JOURNEYED TO YOUR SOLAR SYSTEM, INTENDING TO SAVE YOUR WORLD AND RETURN THE DEVICE--BUT I WAS...DELAYED ON EARTH'S MOON, BY ANOTHER MATTER THAT CURRENTLY CONCERNS ME!*
*THE ACQUISITION OF SOUL GEMS, SPECIFICALLY ADAM WARLOCK'S, AND THE MYSTERIOUS GARDENER'S. THEY BATTLED THE STRANGER SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH SPIDER-MAN! DON'T ASK--READ MARVEL TEAM-UP #55 -- ARCH.
"I ARRIVED AT THIS PLACE WITH BUT SECONDS TO SPARE--PRECIOUS SECONDS WHICH YOU WASTED!
"NOW THE BOMB HAS BEGUN ITS EXPANSION! AND THOUGH IT SEEMS TO PASS HARMLESSLY THROUGH SOLID OBJECTS IT ENCOUNTERS, NOTHING ONCE ENGULFED CAN ESCAPE. NOT EVEN...THE STRANGER!
"IT WILL GROW TO ENCOMPASS THE EARTH, THIS ENTIRE STAR-SYSTEM, AND WHEN IT REACHES THE LIMITS OF ITS EXPANSION--
"--IT WILL SOLIDIFY AND CONTRACT, CRUSHING AND DESTROYING ALL WITHIN!
THERE IS NO WAY NOW THAT I CAN REACH THE ONE OBJECT IN ALL THE UNIVERSE THAT CAN STOP THE BOMB ONCE DETONATED! IT IS... OVER!
WAIT! IF A WAY EXISTS--!


I... SENSE YOUR *THOUGHT*, WOMAN! THERE *IS* A CHANCE!
IF *I* CAN *SLOW* THE BOMB'S GROWTH FROM *WITHIN*--PERHAPS YOU *SIX*--
WE SIX *WHAT?*
I *DUNNO*, WARREN, BUT FROM THE FUNNY WAY HE'S WAVING THAT *HAND* AT US, I GOT A FEELING SOMETHING'S GONNA--
--*HAPPEN!*
SOMETHING *DOES* HAPPEN, ICEMAN--
--BUT IT WOULD TAKE AN *EINSTEIN* TO EVEN BEGIN TO EXPLAIN IT!
AND HIGH IN THE SUNNY BLUE SKY OVER *LOS ANGELES*...
LOOK! SOMETHING'S GROWIN' RIGHT THROUGH THE *WALLS* OF THAT NEW *CHAMPIONS'* BUILDING!
WHAT IS IT? *WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE LORD DOES IT MEAN?!!*
IT MEANS THEY'RE JUST LIKE THE *REST* OF THEIR *KIND*--


"--CARRYING OUT ALL KINDS OF CRAZY EXPERIMENTS AND NOT GIVING A DAMN ABOUT US "MERE HUMANS" BELOW!"
WRONG, FRIEND-- MORE WRONG THAN YOU'LL EVER IMAGINE!
WHERE-- WHERE ARE WE?!!
WHY NOT ASK THE PRINCE OF POWER, ANGEL, 'CAUSE HE KNOWS.
BOY, DOES HE EVER!
CHAMPIONS, PREPARE THYSELVES! THEY WILL BE UPON US ANY MOMENT!
THEY?
THE BEAST-MEN, MILADY! EVIL SERVANTS OF HE WHO IS CALLED--
--KAMO THARN!
CURSED THOUGH I BE WITH BLINDNESS, WELL DO I KNOW THAT VOICE!
IT IS HE, MY SUBJECTS! HE WHO STOLE MY LIFE--MY RUNESTAFF!* 'TIS HERCULES!! AND BY MY HOLY WORD, THIS TIME HE SHALL DIE!!
*THOR #235 --ARCHIE, FOR THE LAST TIME ALREADY!

IT'S THE CHAMPIONS AT ONE END, THE STRANGER AT THE OTHER, AND BLACK GOLIATH IN THE MIDDLE OF:

THE DOOM THAT WENT ON FOREVER!

THE CHAMPIONS
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
TM
©1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
YOU FIGHT IN VAIN, HUMANS--
--THERE IS NO DEFEATING THE CREATURES OF KAMO THARN!
COCKRUM
MILGROM
THE DOOM THAT WENT ON FOREVER!

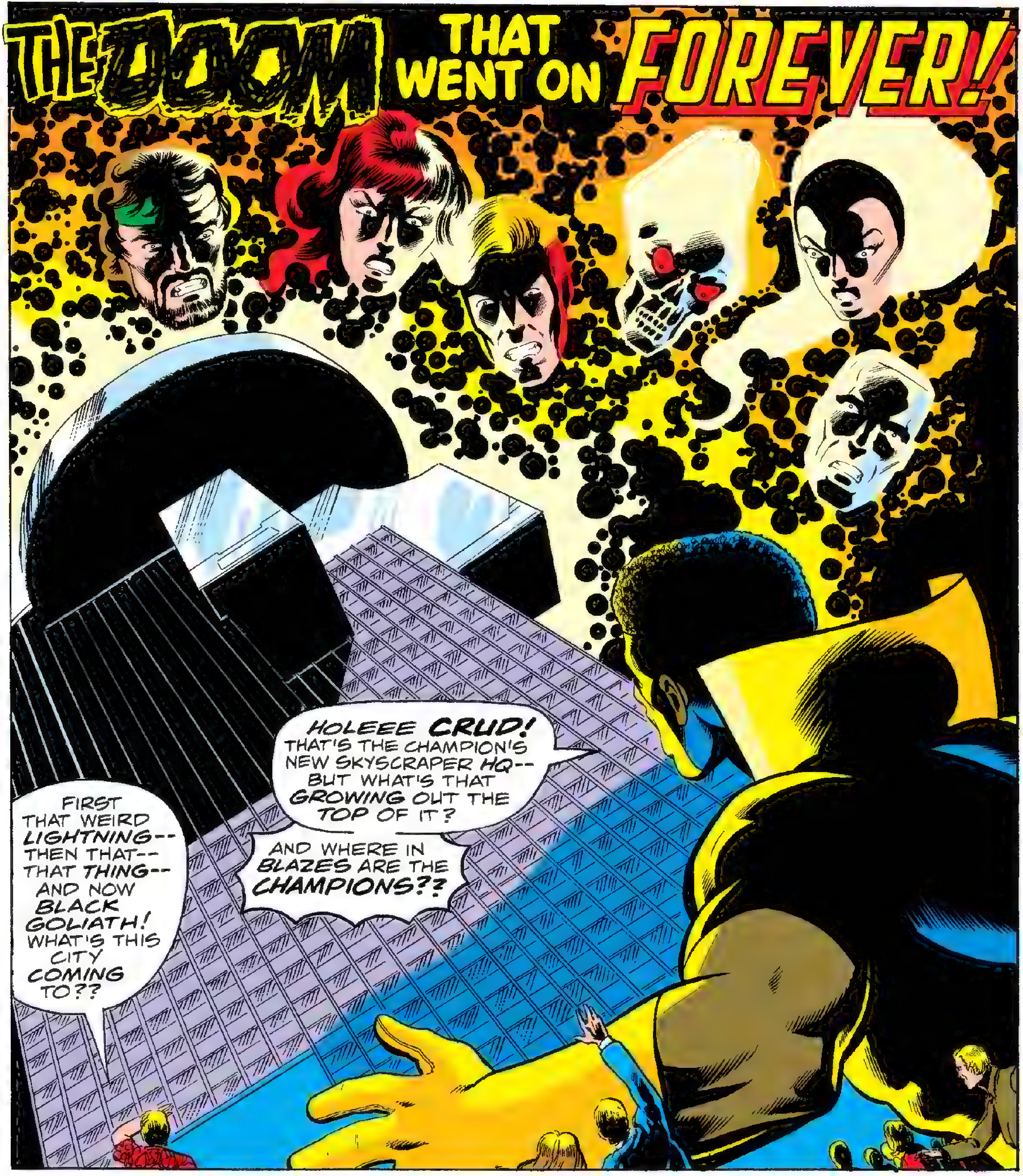
The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

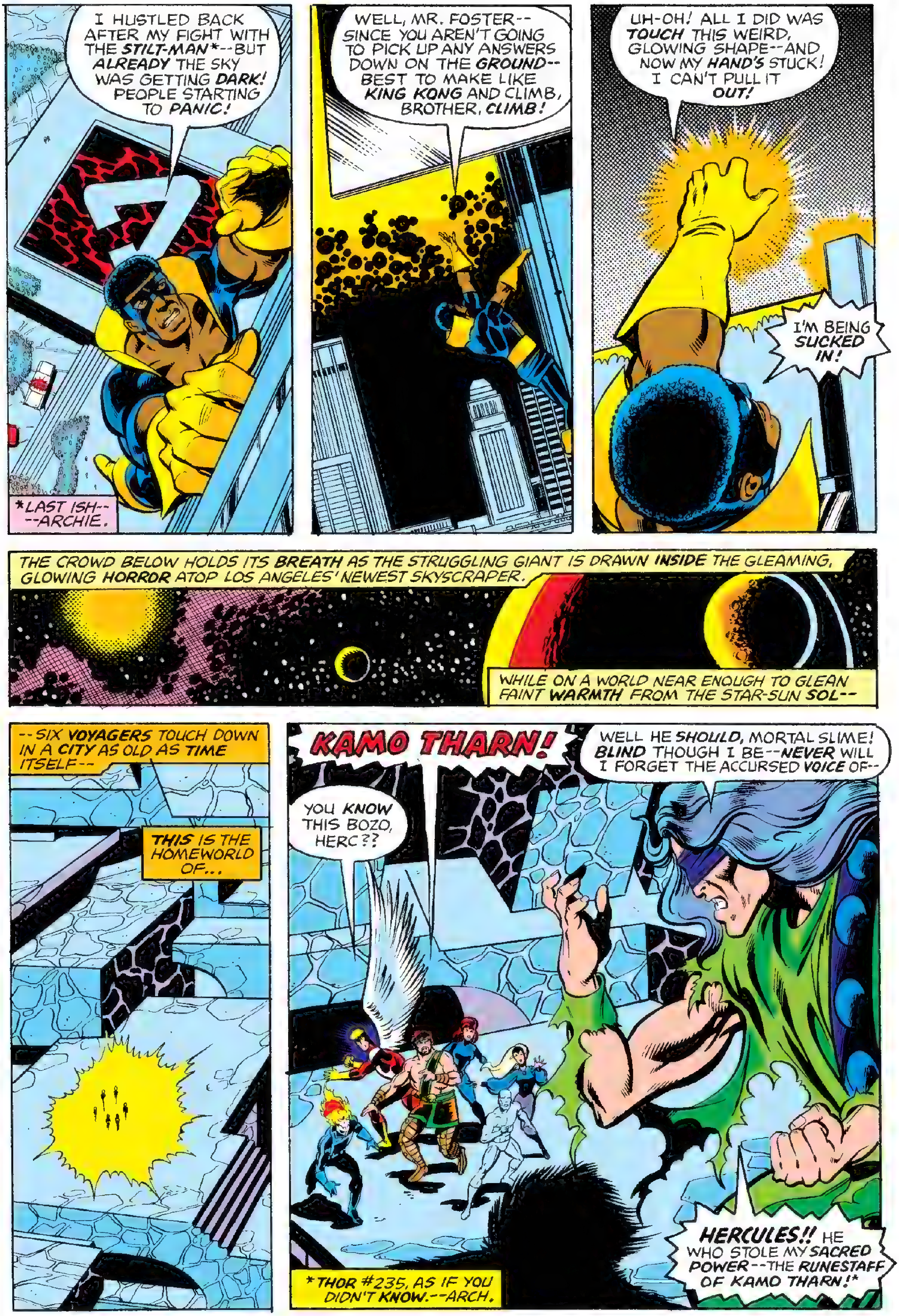
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

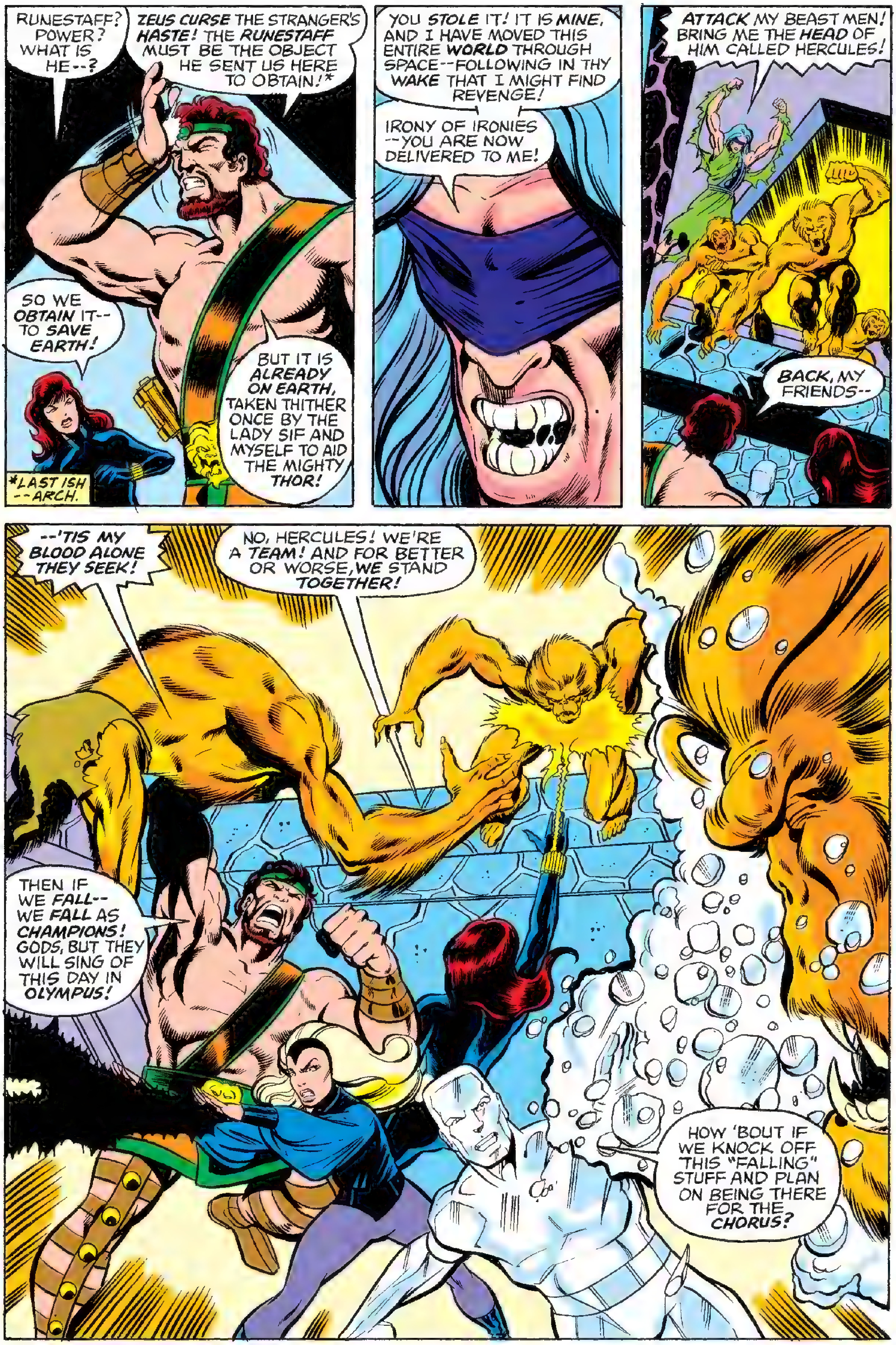
THE CHAMPIONS™

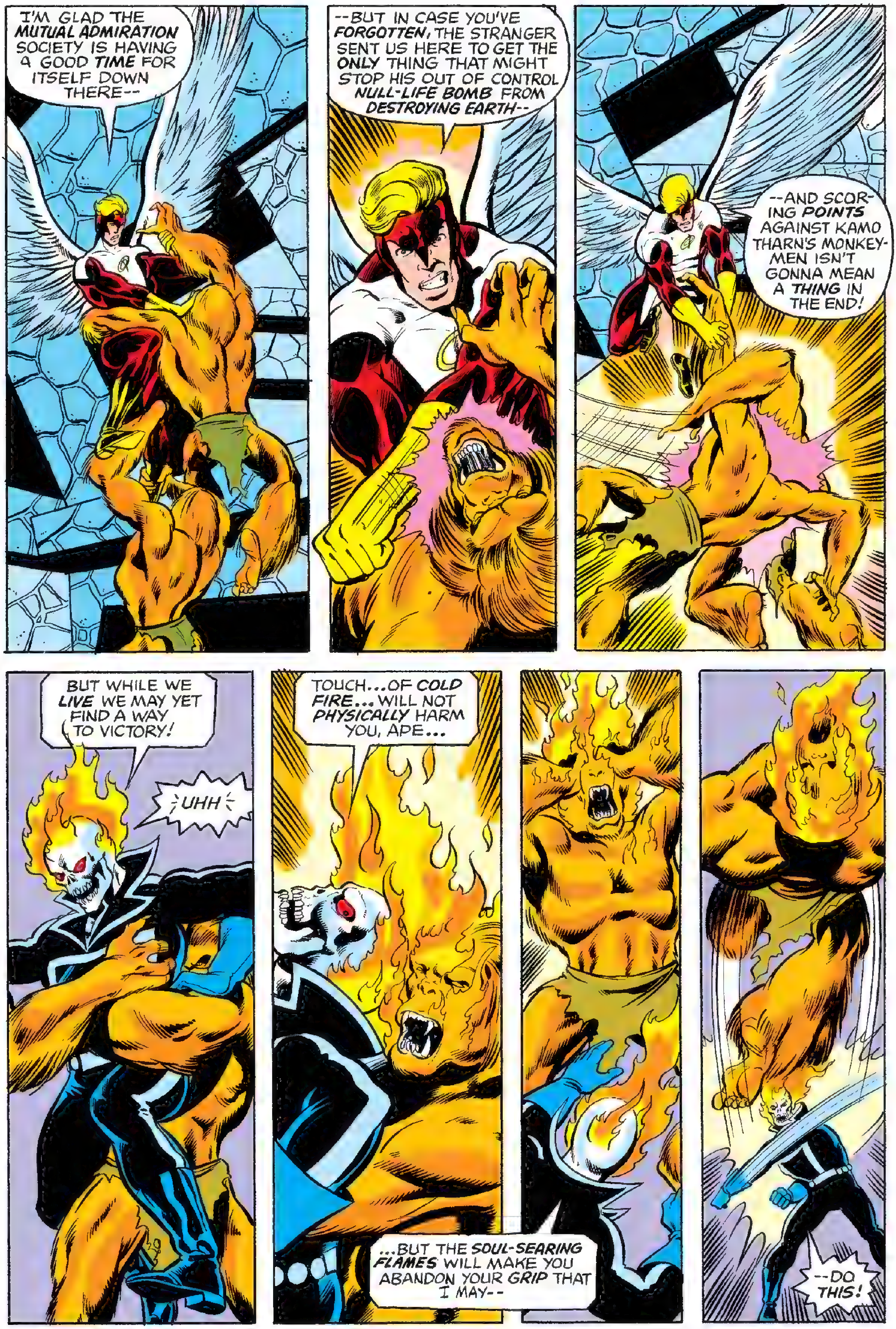
JUST ANOTHER SLIGHTLY *STUPENDOUS* ISSUE BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
BILL MANTLO WRITER / JOHN BYRNE ARTIST / BOB LAYTON INKER / IRVING WATANABE LETTERER / BRUCE PATTERSON & GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORISTS / ARCHIE GOODWIN EDITOR

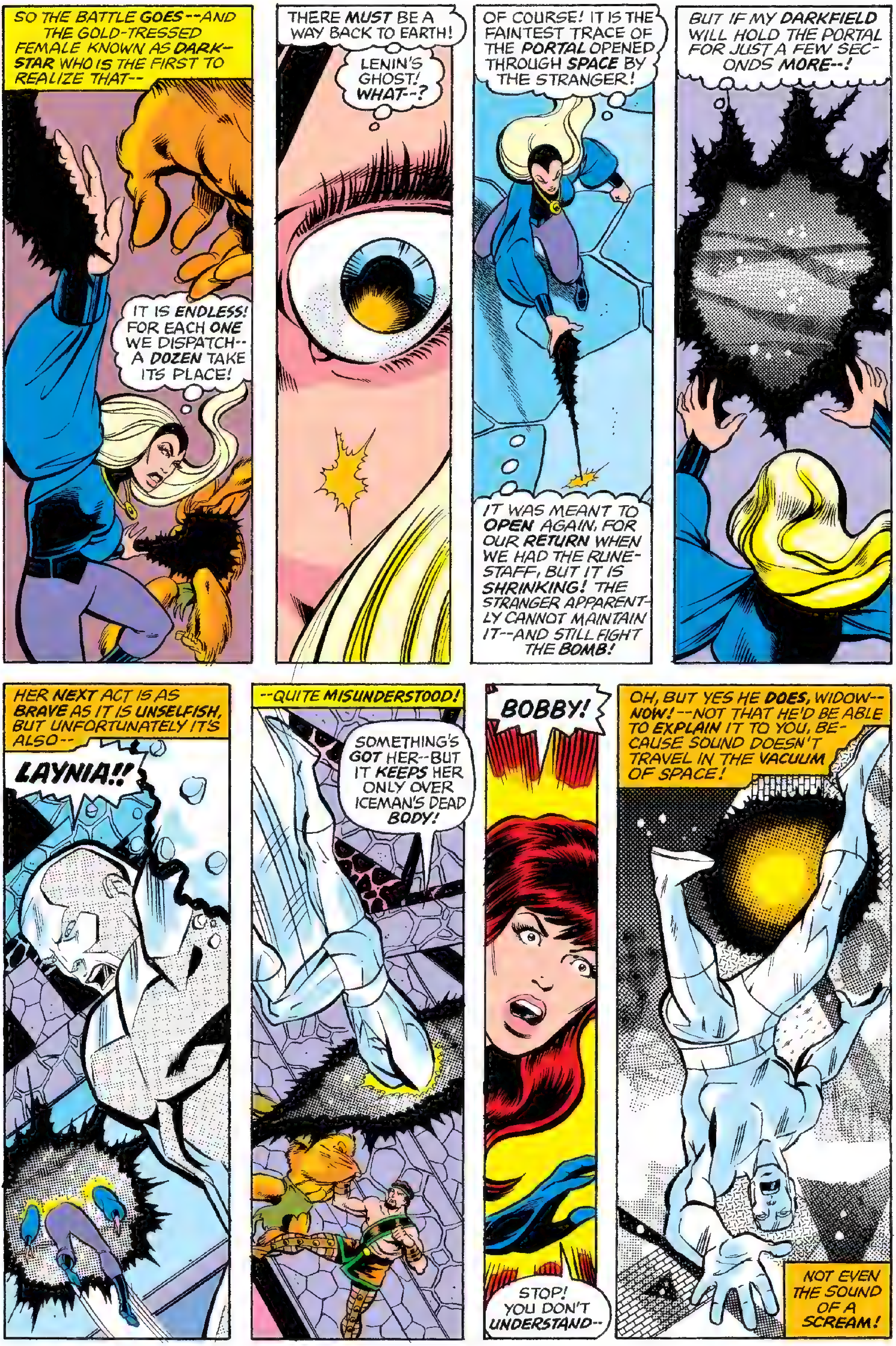
THE DOOM THAT WENT ON FOREVER!

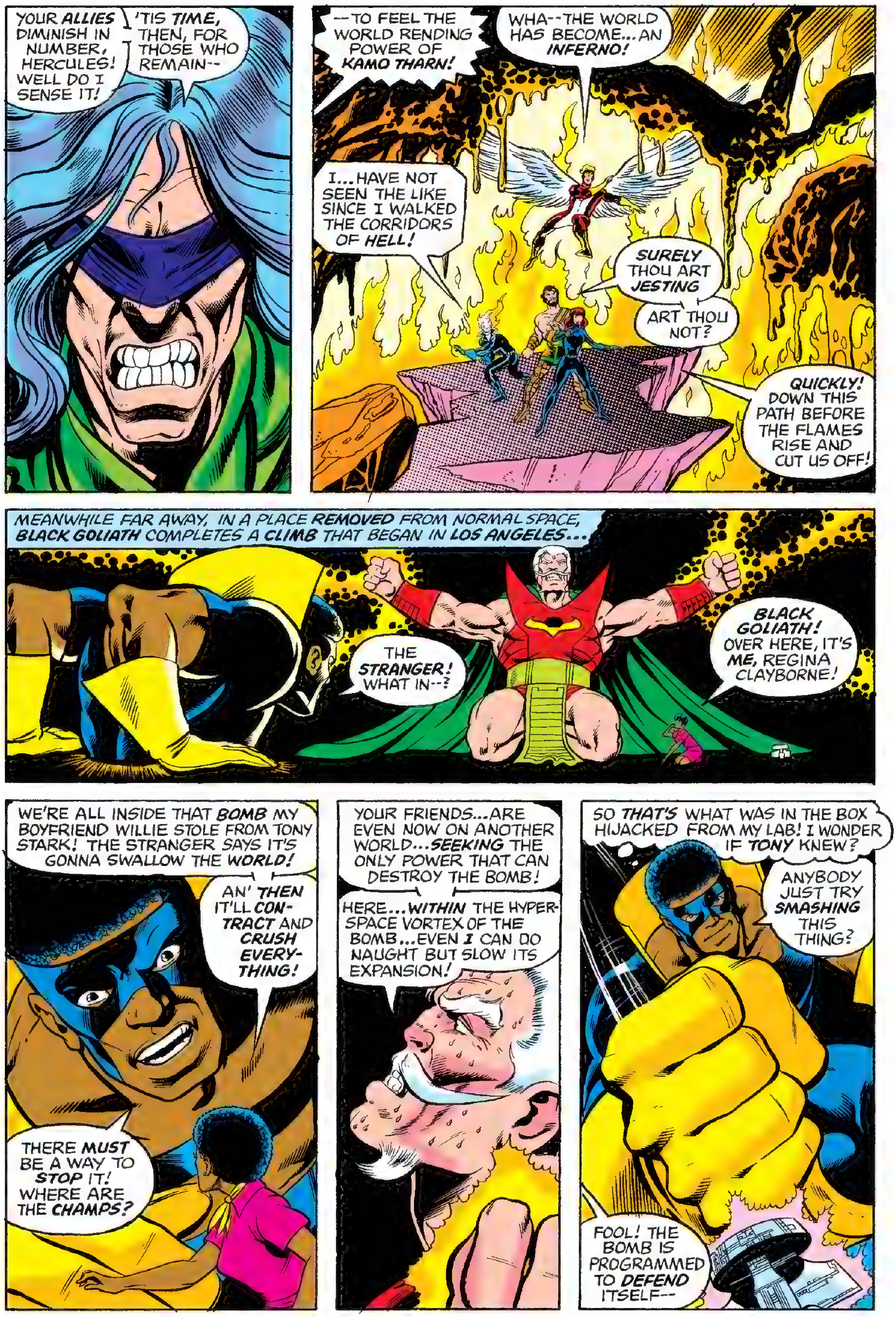

HOLEEE CRUD! THAT'S THE CHAMPION'S NEW SKYSCRAPER HQ-- BUT WHAT'S THAT GROWING OUT THE TOP OF IT?
FIRST THAT WEIRD LIGHTNING-- THEN THAT-- THAT THING-- AND NOW BLACK GOLIATH! WHAT'S THIS CITY COMING TO??
AND WHERE IN BLAZES ARE THE CHAMPIONS??

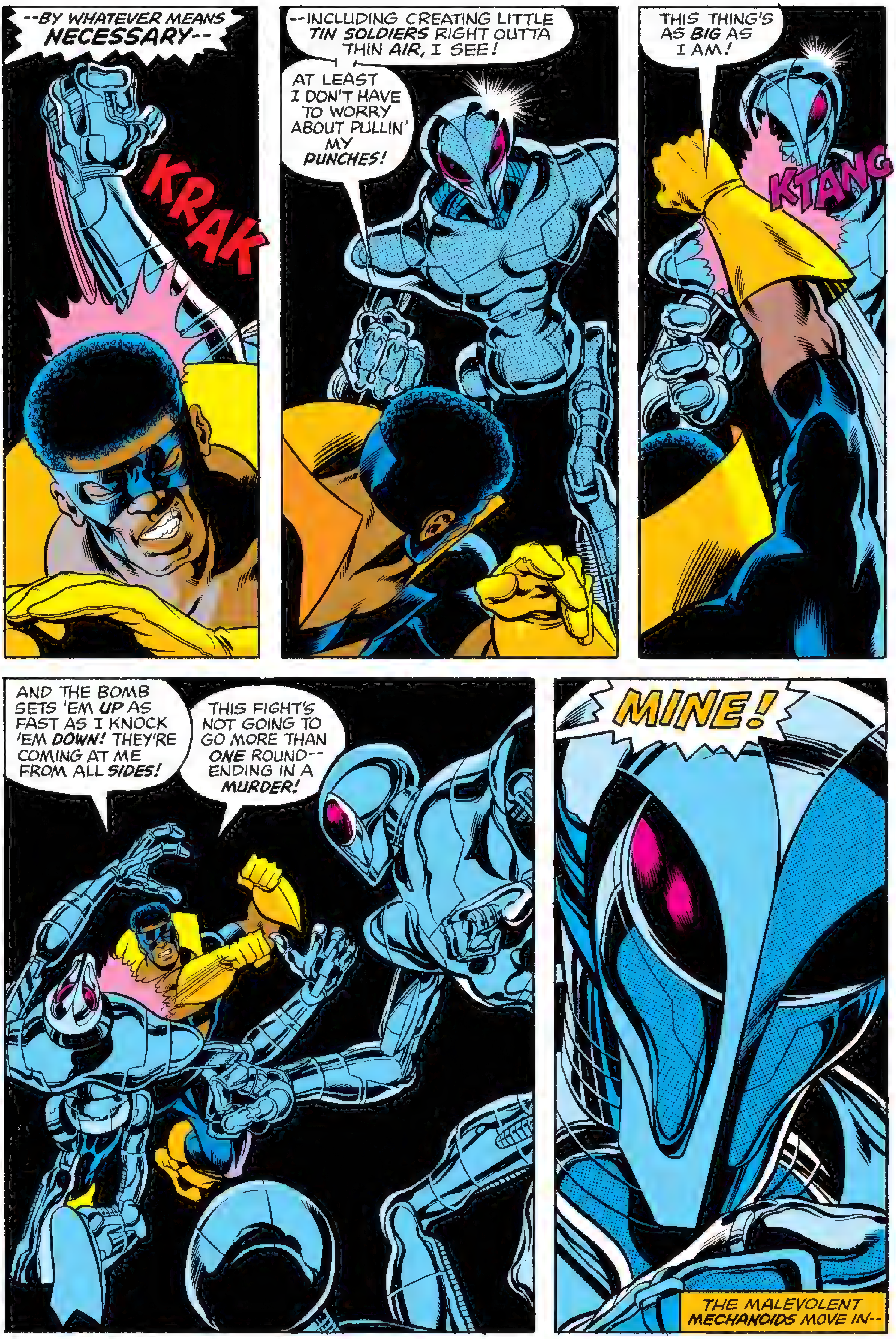

I HUSTLED BACK AFTER MY FIGHT WITH THE **STILT-MAN***--BUT **ALREADY** THE SKY WAS GETTING **DARK!** PEOPLE STARTING TO **PANIC!**
*LAST ISH-- --ARCHIE.
WELL, MR. FOSTER-- SINCE YOU AREN'T GOING TO PICK UP ANY ANSWERS DOWN ON THE **GROUND**-- BEST TO MAKE LIKE **KING KONG** AND CLIMB, BROTHER, **CLIMB!**
UH-OH! ALL I DID WAS **TOUCH** THIS WEIRD, GLOWING SHAPE--AND NOW MY **HAND'S** STUCK! I CAN'T PULL IT **OUT!**
I'M BEING **SUCKED IN!**
THE CROWD BELOW HOLDS ITS **BREATH** AS THE STRUGGLING GIANT IS DRAWN **INSIDE** THE GLEAMING, GLOWING **HORROR** ATOP LOS ANGELES' NEWEST SKYSCRAPER.
WHILE ON A WORLD NEAR ENOUGH TO GLEAN FAINT **WARMTH** FROM THE STAR-SUN **SOL**--
--SIX **VOYAGERS** TOUCH DOWN IN A **CITY** AS OLD AS **TIME** ITSELF--
THIS IS THE HOMEWORLD OF...
KAMO THARN!
YOU **KNOW** THIS BOZO, HERC??
WELL HE **SHOULD**, MORTAL SLIME! **BLIND** THOUGH I BE--**NEVER** WILL I FORGET THE ACCURSED **VOICE** OF--
HERCULES!! HE WHO STOLE MY **SACRED POWER**--THE **RUNESTAFF OF KAMO THARN!***
***THOR** #235, AS IF YOU DIDN'T **KNOW**.--ARCH.

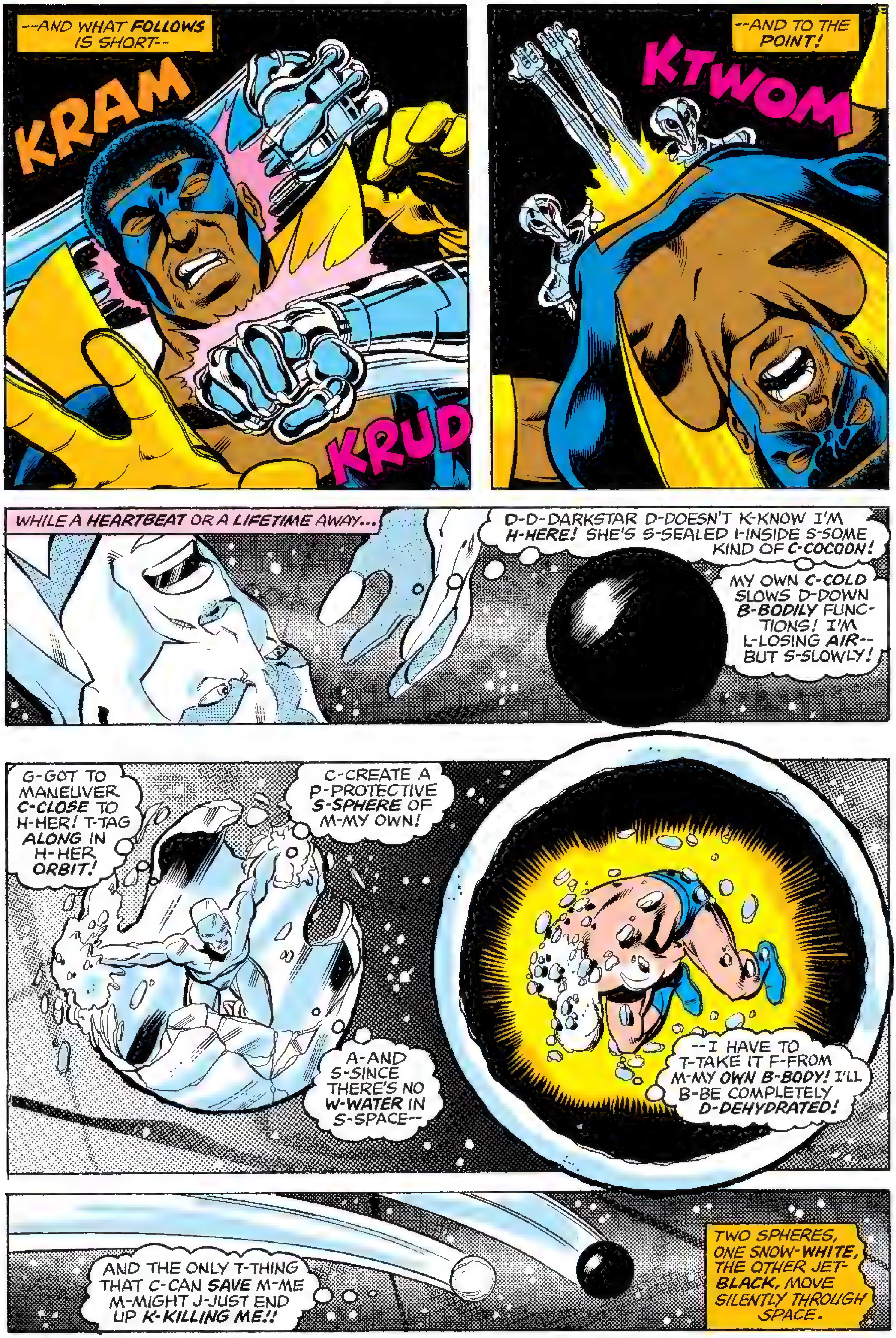

RUNESTAFF? POWER? WHAT IS HE--?
ZEUS CURSE THE STRANGER'S HASTE! THE RUNESTAFF MUST BE THE OBJECT HE SENT US HERE TO OBTAIN!*
SO WE OBTAIN IT--TO SAVE EARTH!
BUT IT IS ALREADY ON EARTH, TAKEN THITHER ONCE BY THE LADY SIF AND MYSELF TO AID THE MIGHTY THOR!
*LAST ISH --ARCH.
YOU STOLE IT! IT IS MINE, AND I HAVE MOVED THIS ENTIRE WORLD THROUGH SPACE--FOLLOWING IN THY WAKE THAT I MIGHT FIND REVENGE!
IRONY OF IRONIES --YOU ARE NOW DELIVERED TO ME!
ATTACK MY BEAST MEN! BRING ME THE HEAD OF HIM CALLED HERCULES!
BACK, MY FRIENDS--
--'TIS MY BLOOD ALONE THEY SEEK!
NO, HERCULES! WE'RE A TEAM! AND FOR BETTER OR WORSE, WE STAND TOGETHER!
THEN IF WE FALL-- WE FALL AS CHAMPIONS! GODS, BUT THEY WILL SING OF THIS DAY IN OLYMPUS!
HOW 'BOUT IF WE KNOCK OFF THIS "FALLING" STUFF AND PLAN ON BEING THERE FOR THE CHORUS?

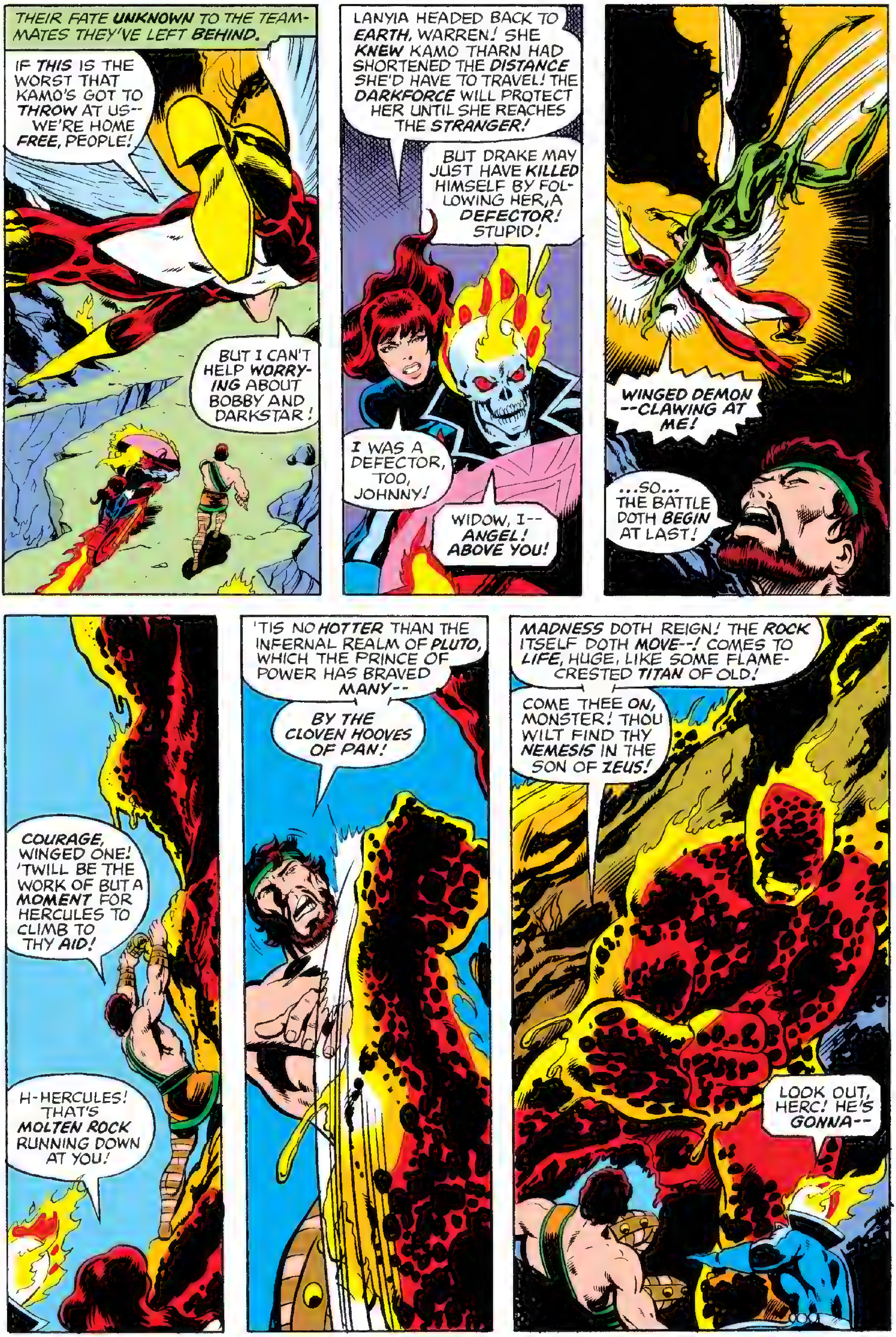

I'M GLAD THE **MUTUAL ADMIRATION** SOCIETY IS HAVING A GOOD **TIME** FOR ITSELF DOWN THERE--
--BUT IN CASE YOU'VE **FORGOTTEN**, THE STRANGER SENT US HERE TO GET THE **ONLY** THING THAT MIGHT STOP HIS OUT OF CONTROL **NULL-LIFE BOMB** FROM **DESTROYING EARTH**--
--AND SCORING **POINTS** AGAINST KAMO THARN'S MONKEY-MEN ISN'T GONNA MEAN A **THING** IN THE END!
BUT WHILE WE **LIVE** WE MAY YET FIND A WAY TO VICTORY!
UHH
TOUCH...OF **COLD FIRE**... WILL NOT **PHYSICALLY** HARM YOU, APE...
...BUT THE **SOUL-SEARING FLAMES** WILL MAKE YOU ABANDON YOUR **GRIP** THAT I MAY--
--DO **THIS!**


SO THE BATTLE GOES--AND THE GOLD-TRESSED FEMALE KNOWN AS DARKSTAR WHO IS THE FIRST TO REALIZE THAT--
IT IS ENDLESS! FOR EACH ONE WE DISPATCH--A DOZEN TAKE ITS PLACE!
THERE MUST BE A WAY BACK TO EARTH!
LENIN'S GHOST! WHAT--?
OF COURSE! IT IS THE FAINTEST TRACE OF THE PORTAL OPENED THROUGH SPACE BY THE STRANGER!
IT WAS MEANT TO OPEN AGAIN, FOR OUR RETURN WHEN WE HAD THE RUNE-STAFF, BUT IT IS SHRINKING! THE STRANGER APPARENTLY CANNOT MAINTAIN IT--AND STILL FIGHT THE BOMB!
BUT IF MY DARKFIELD WILL HOLD THE PORTAL FOR JUST A FEW SECONDS MORE--!
HER NEXT ACT IS AS BRAVE AS IT IS UNSELFISH, BUT UNFORTUNATELY IT'S ALSO--
LAYNIA!!
--QUITE MISUNDERSTOOD!
SOMETHING'S GOT HER--BUT IT KEEPS HER ONLY OVER ICEMAN'S DEAD BODY!
BOBBY!
STOP! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND--
OH, BUT YES HE DOES, WIDOW--NOW!--NOT THAT HE'D BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU, BECAUSE SOUND DOESN'T TRAVEL IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE!
NOT EVEN THE SOUND OF A SCREAM!

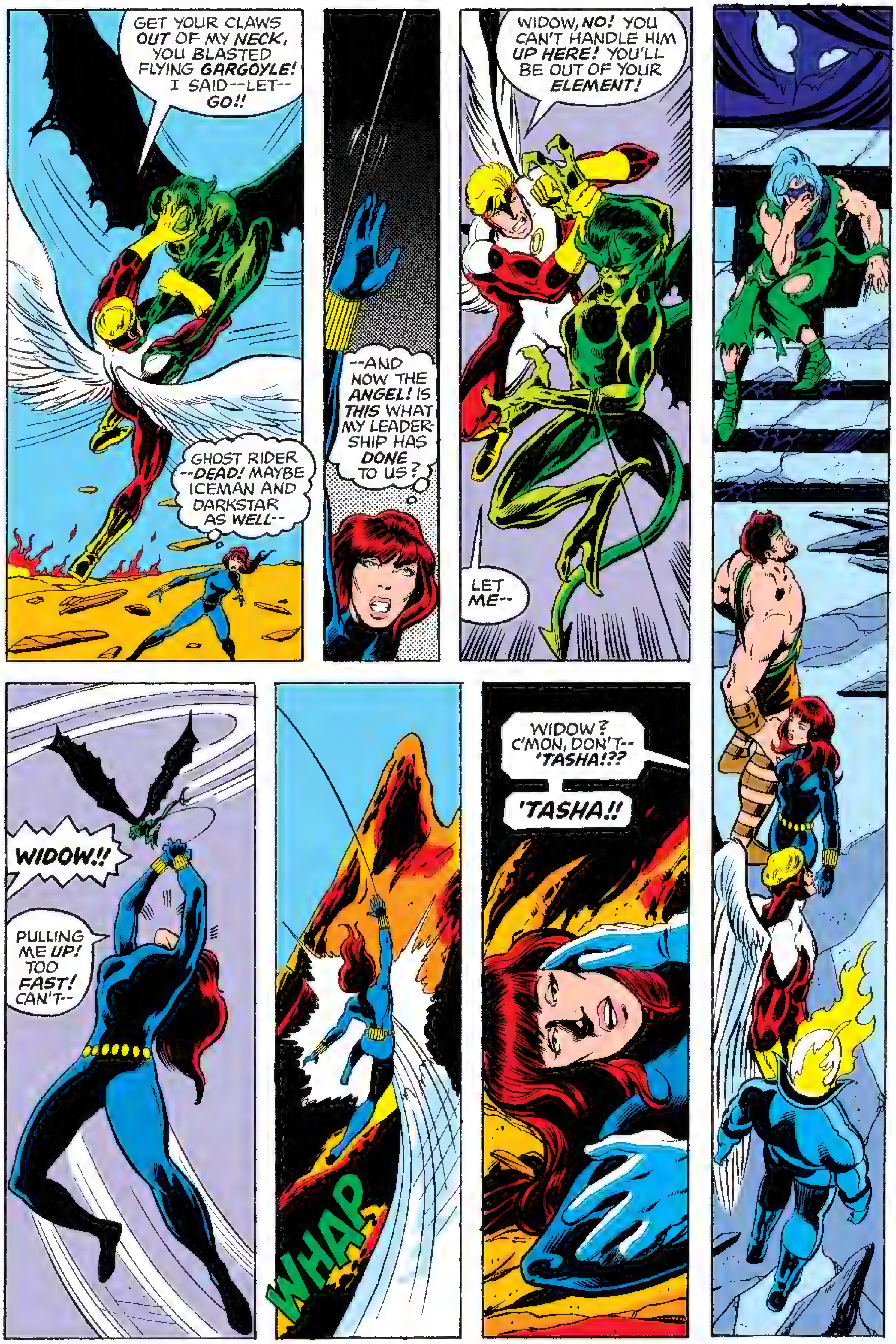

YOUR ALLIES DIMINISH IN NUMBER, HERCULES! WELL DO I SENSE IT!
'TIS TIME, THEN, FOR THOSE WHO REMAIN--
--TO FEEL THE WORLD RENDING POWER OF KAMO THARN!
WHA--THE WORLD HAS BECOME...AN INFERNO!
I...HAVE NOT SEEN THE LIKE SINCE I WALKED THE CORRIDORS OF HELL!
SURELY THOU ART JESTING
ART THOU NOT?
QUICKLY! DOWN THIS PATH BEFORE THE FLAMES RISE AND CUT US OFF!
MEANWHILE FAR AWAY, IN A PLACE REMOVED FROM NORMAL SPACE, BLACK GOLIATH COMPLETES A CLIMB THAT BEGAN IN LOS ANGELES...
THE STRANGER! WHAT IN--?
BLACK GOLIATH! OVER HERE, IT'S ME, REGINA CLAYBORNE!
WE'RE ALL INSIDE THAT BOMB MY BOYFRIEND WILLIE STOLE FROM TONY STARK! THE STRANGER SAYS IT'S GONNA SWALLOW THE WORLD!
AN' THEN IT'LL CONTRACT AND CRUSH EVERYTHING!
THERE MUST BE A WAY TO STOP IT! WHERE ARE THE CHAMPS?
YOUR FRIENDS...ARE EVEN NOW ON ANOTHER WORLD...SEEKING THE ONLY POWER THAT CAN DESTROY THE BOMB!
HERE...WITHIN THE HYPER-SPACE VORTEX OF THE BOMB...EVEN I CAN DO NAUGHT BUT SLOW ITS EXPANSION!
SO THAT'S WHAT WAS IN THE BOX HIJACKED FROM MY LAB! I WONDER IF TONY KNEW?
ANYBODY JUST TRY SMASHING THIS THING?
FOOL! THE BOMB IS PROGRAMMED TO DEFEND ITSELF--

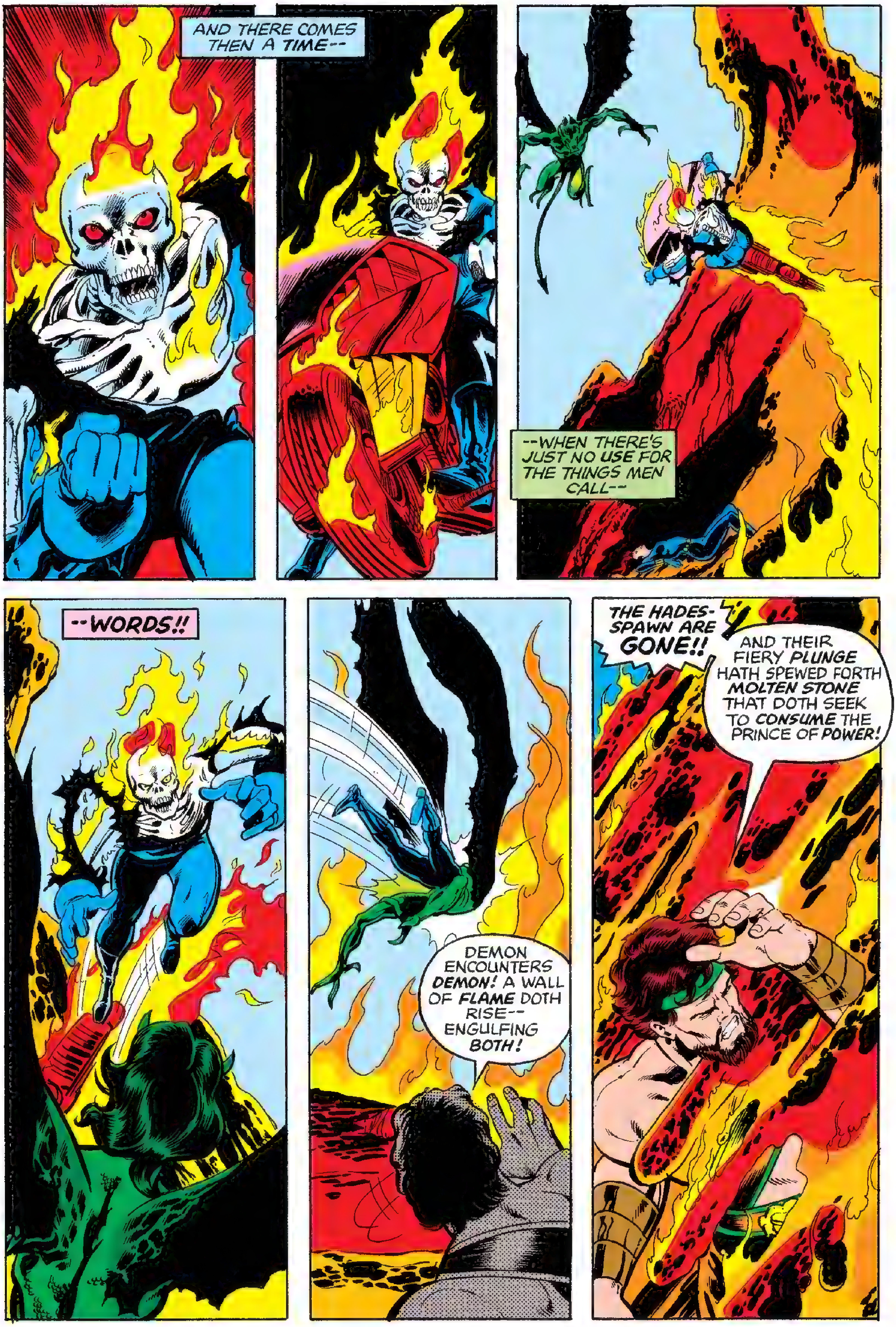

--BY WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY--
KRAK
--INCLUDING CREATING LITTLE TIN SOLDIERS RIGHT OUTTA THIN AIR, I SEE!
AT LEAST I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT PULLIN' MY PUNCHES!
THIS THING'S AS BIG AS I AM!
KTANG
AND THE BOMB SETS 'EM UP AS FAST AS I KNOCK 'EM DOWN! THEY'RE COMING AT ME FROM ALL SIDES!
THIS FIGHT'S NOT GOING TO GO MORE THAN ONE ROUND-- ENDING IN A MURDER!
MINE!
THE MALEVOLENT MECHANOIDS MOVE IN--

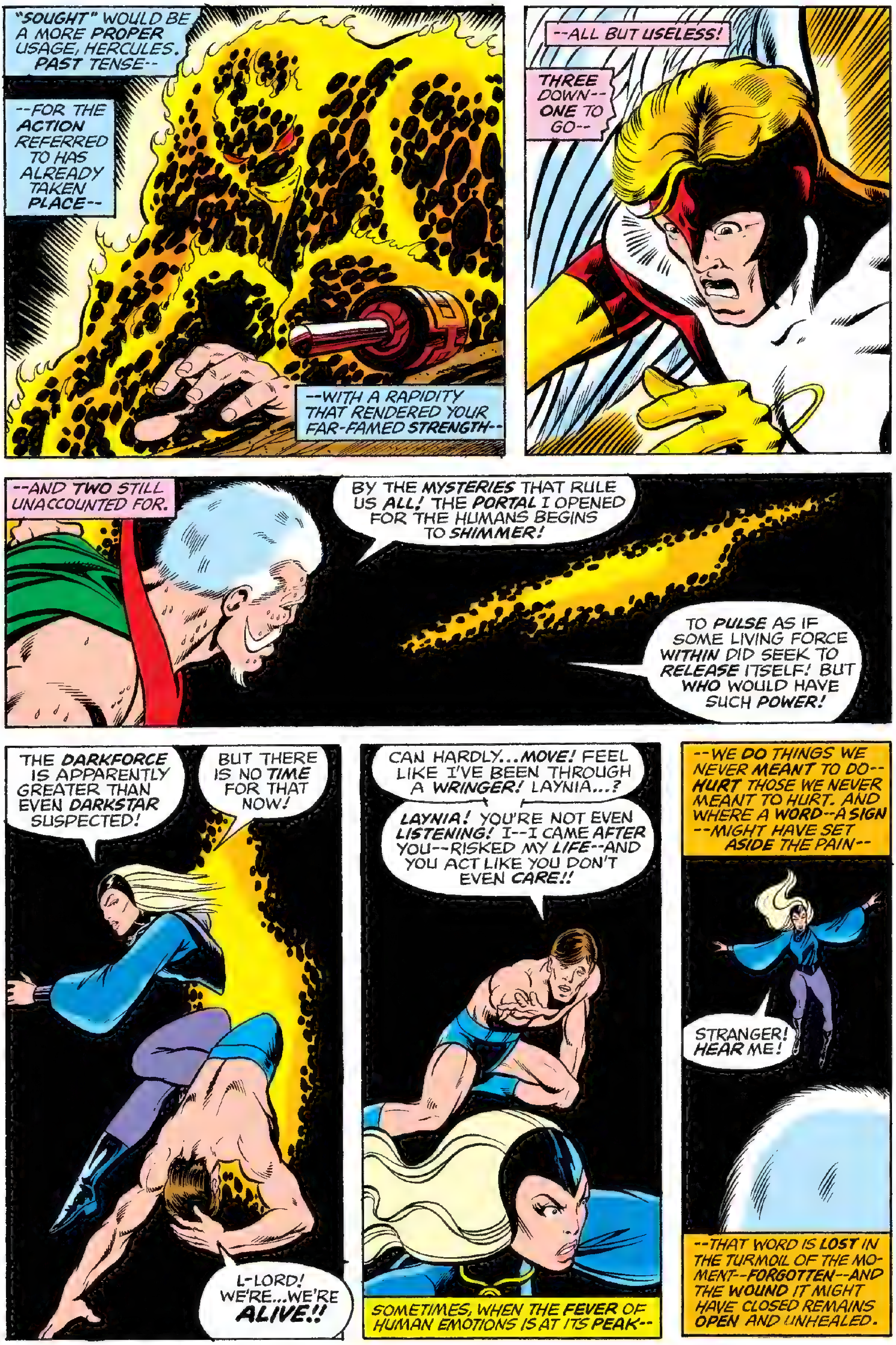

--AND WHAT FOLLOWS IS SHORT--
KRAM
KRUD
--AND TO THE POINT!
KTWOM
WHILE A HEARTBEAT OR A LIFETIME AWAY...
D-D-DARKSTAR D-DOESN'T K-KNOW I'M H-HERE! SHE'S S-SEALED I-INSIDE S-SOME KIND OF C-COCOON!
MY OWN C-COLD SLOWS D-DOWN B-BODILY FUNCTIONS! I'M L-LOSING AIR-- BUT S-SLOWLY!
G-GOT TO MANEUVER C-CLOSE TO H-HER! T-TAG ALONG IN H-HER ORBIT!
C-CREATE A P-PROTECTIVE S-SPHERE OF M-MY OWN!
A-AND S-SINCE THERE'S NO W-WATER IN S-SPACE--
--I HAVE TO T-TAKE IT F-FROM M-MY OWN B-BODY! I'LL B-BE COMPLETELY D-DEHYDRATED!
AND THE ONLY T-THING THAT C-CAN SAVE M-ME M-MIGHT J-JUST END UP K-KILLING ME!!
TWO SPHERES, ONE SNOW-WHITE, THE OTHER JET-BLACK, MOVE SILENTLY THROUGH SPACE.

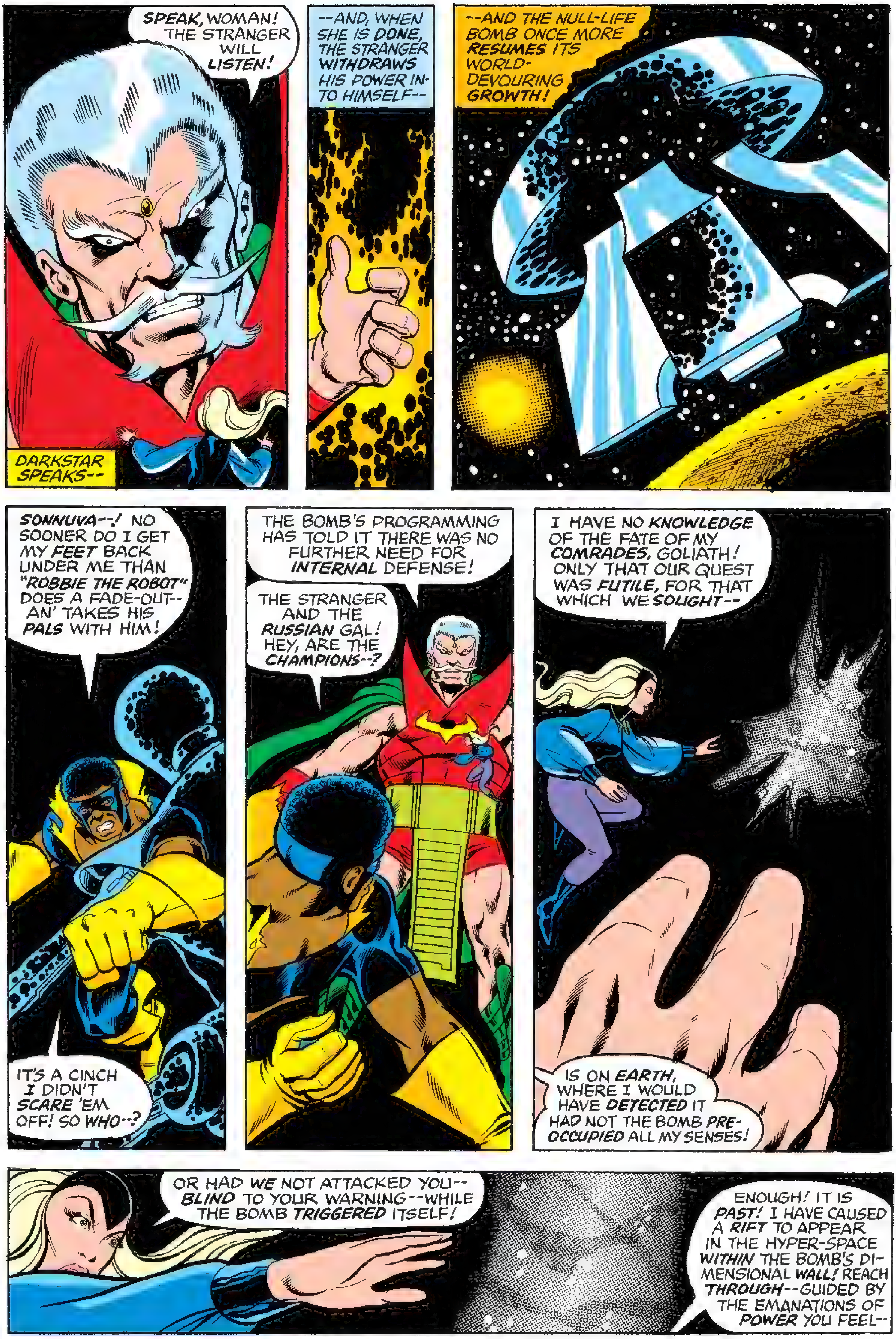

THEIR FATE **UNKNOWN** TO THE TEAMMATES THEY'VE LEFT **BEHIND.**
IF **THIS** IS THE WORST THAT KAMO'S GOT TO **THROW** AT US-- WE'RE HOME **FREE,** PEOPLE!
BUT I CAN'T HELP **WORRYING** ABOUT BOBBY AND DARKSTAR!
LANYIA HEADED BACK TO **EARTH,** WARREN! SHE **KNEW** KAMO THARN HAD SHORTENED THE **DISTANCE** SHE'D HAVE TO TRAVEL! THE **DARKFORCE** WILL PROTECT HER UNTIL SHE REACHES THE **STRANGER!**
BUT DRAKE MAY JUST HAVE **KILLED** HIMSELF BY FOLLOWING HER, A **DEFECTOR!** STUPID!
I WAS A DEFECTOR, TOO, JOHNNY!
WIDOW, I-- **ANGEL! ABOVE YOU!**
WINGED DEMON --CLAWING AT ME!
...SO... THE BATTLE DOTH **BEGIN** AT LAST!
COURAGE, WINGED ONE! 'TWILL BE THE WORK OF BUT A **MOMENT** FOR HERCULES TO CLIMB TO THY **AID!**
H-HERCULES! THAT'S **MOLTEN ROCK** RUNNING DOWN AT YOU!
'TIS NO **HOTTER** THAN THE INFERNAL REALM OF **PLUTO,** WHICH THE PRINCE OF POWER HAS BRAVED **MANY--**
BY THE CLOVEN HOOVES OF PAN!
MADNESS DOTH REIGN! THE **ROCK** ITSELF DOTH **MOVE--!** COMES TO **LIFE,** HUGE, LIKE SOME FLAME-CRESTED **TITAN** OF OLD!
COME THEE **ON,** MONSTER! THOU WILT FIND THY **NEMESIS** IN THE SON OF **ZEUS!**
LOOK OUT, HERC! HE'S **GONNA--**

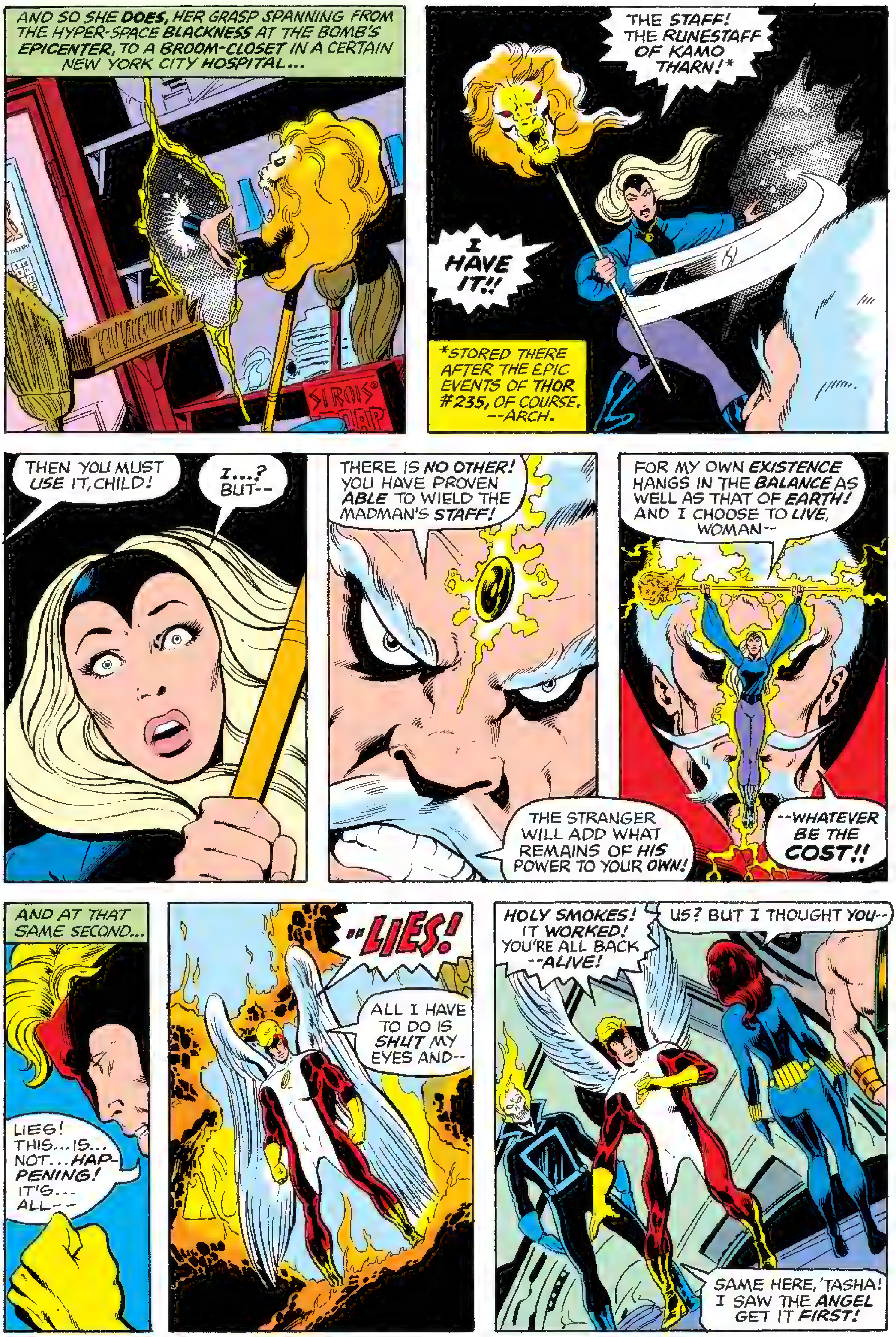
WHOM!
HE DID!!
I DON'T THINK MY SPOOK-ACT WILL IMPRESS THIS WALKING NIGHTMARE-- BUT THAT'S WHERE HELLFIRE COMES IN-- AND THIS TIME AT FULL STRENGTH!
WHATEVER IT WAS SUPPOSED TO DO, ITS EFFECT ON THE CREATURE IS, SIMPLY--
EEYAAGGH!
--NO EFFECT AT ALL!

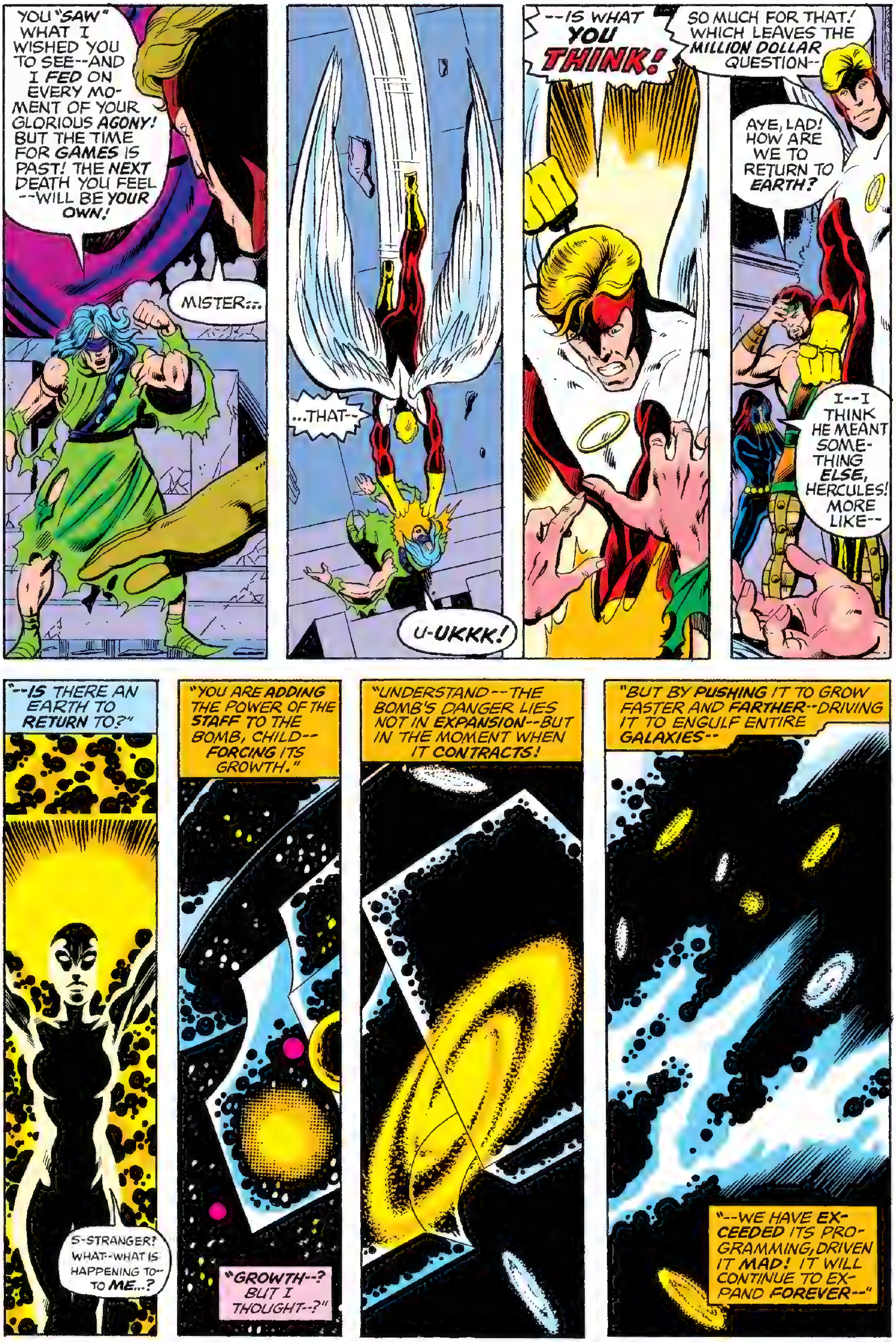

GET YOUR CLAWS OUT OF MY NECK, YOU BLASTED FLYING GARGOYLE! I SAID--LET--GO!!
GHOST RIDER--DEAD! MAYBE ICEMAN AND DARKSTAR AS WELL--
--AND NOW THE ANGEL! IS THIS WHAT MY LEADERSHIP HAS DONE TO US?
WIDOW, NO! YOU CAN'T HANDLE HIM UP HERE! YOU'LL BE OUT OF YOUR ELEMENT!
LET ME--
WIDOW!!
PULLING ME UP! TOO FAST! CAN'T--
WHAP
WIDOW? C'MON, DON'T--'TASHA!??
'TASHA!!

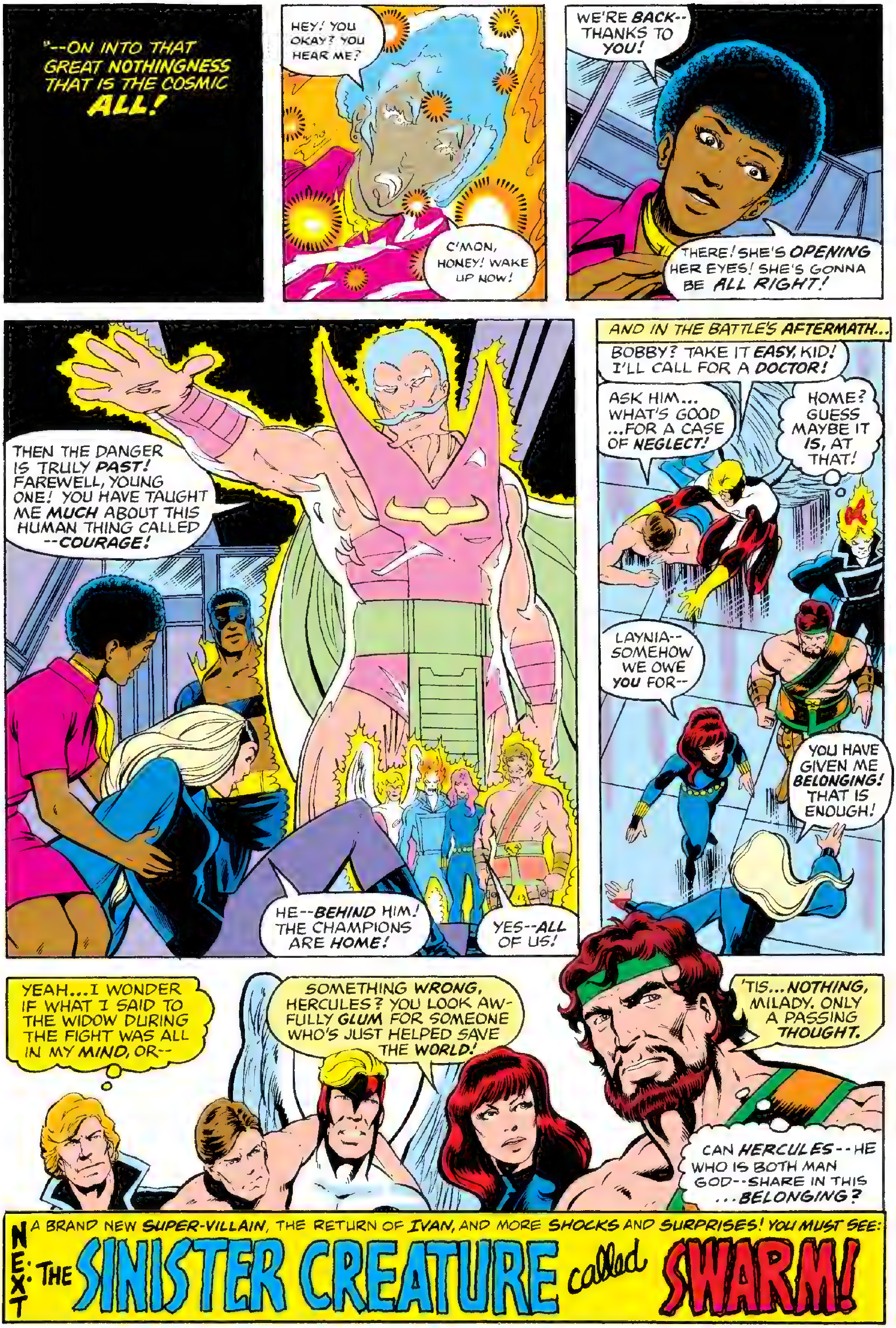

AND THERE COMES THEN A TIME--
--WHEN THERE'S JUST NO USE FOR THE THINGS MEN CALL--
--WORDS!!
DEMON ENCOUNTERS DEMON! A WALL OF FLAME DOTH RISE-- ENGULFING BOTH!
THE HADES-SPAWN ARE GONE!!
AND THEIR FIERY PLUNGE HATH SPEWED FORTH MOLTEN STONE THAT DOTH SEEK TO CONSUME THE PRINCE OF POWER!


"SOUGHT" WOULD BE A MORE PROPER USAGE, HERCULES. PAST TENSE--
--FOR THE ACTION REFERRED TO HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE--
--WITH A RAPIDITY THAT RENDERED YOUR FAR-FAMED STRENGTH--
--ALL BUT USELESS!
THREE DOWN-- ONE TO GO--
--AND TWO STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR.
BY THE MYSTERIES THAT RULE US ALL! THE PORTAL I OPENED FOR THE HUMANS BEGINS TO SHIMMER!
TO PULSE AS IF SOME LIVING FORCE WITHIN DID SEEK TO RELEASE ITSELF! BUT WHO WOULD HAVE SUCH POWER!
THE DARKFORCE IS APPARENTLY GREATER THAN EVEN DARKSTAR SUSPECTED!
BUT THERE IS NO TIME FOR THAT NOW!
L-LORD! WE'RE...WE'RE ALIVE!!
CAN HARDLY...MOVE! FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN THROUGH A WRINGER! LAYNIA...?
LAYNIA! YOU'RE NOT EVEN LISTENING! I--I CAME AFTER YOU--RISKED MY LIFE--AND YOU ACT LIKE YOU DON'T EVEN CARE!!
SOMETIMES, WHEN THE FEVER OF HUMAN EMOTIONS IS AT ITS PEAK--
--WE DO THINGS WE NEVER MEANT TO DO--HURT THOSE WE NEVER MEANT TO HURT. AND WHERE A WORD--A SIGN--MIGHT HAVE SET ASIDE THE PAIN--
STRANGER! HEAR ME!
--THAT WORD IS LOST IN THE TURMOIL OF THE MOMENT--FORGOTTEN--AND THE WOUND IT MIGHT HAVE CLOSED REMAINS OPEN AND UNHEALED.


SPEAK, WOMAN! THE STRANGER WILL LISTEN!
DARKSTAR SPEAKS--
--AND, WHEN SHE IS DONE, THE STRANGER WITHDRAWS HIS POWER INTO HIMSELF--
--AND THE NULL-LIFE BOMB ONCE MORE RESUMES ITS WORLD-DEVOURING GROWTH!
SONNUVA--! NO SOONER DO I GET MY FEET BACK UNDER ME THAN "ROBBIE THE ROBOT" DOES A FADE-OUT--AN' TAKES HIS PALS WITH HIM!
IT'S A CINCH I DIDN'T SCARE 'EM OFF! SO WHO--?
THE BOMB'S PROGRAMMING HAS TOLD IT THERE WAS NO FURTHER NEED FOR INTERNAL DEFENSE!
THE STRANGER AND THE RUSSIAN GAL! HEY, ARE THE CHAMPIONS--?
I HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE FATE OF MY COMRADES, GOLIATH! ONLY THAT OUR QUEST WAS FUTILE, FOR THAT WHICH WE SOUGHT--
IS ON EARTH, WHERE I WOULD HAVE DETECTED IT HAD NOT THE BOMB PRE-OCCUPIED ALL MY SENSES!
OR HAD WE NOT ATTACKED YOU--BLIND TO YOUR WARNING--WHILE THE BOMB TRIGGERED ITSELF!
ENOUGH! IT IS PAST! I HAVE CAUSED A RIFT TO APPEAR IN THE HYPER-SPACE WITHIN THE BOMB'S DIMENSIONAL WALL! REACH THROUGH--GUIDED BY THE EMANATIONS OF POWER YOU FEEL--


AND SO SHE **DOES**, HER GRASP SPANNING FROM THE HYPER-SPACE **BLACKNESS** AT THE BOMB'S **EPICENTER**, TO A **BROOM-CLOSET** IN A CERTAIN NEW YORK CITY **HOSPITAL**...
SIROIS' SOAP
THE **STAFF!** THE **RUNESTAFF** OF KAMO THARN!*
I HAVE IT!!
*STORED THERE AFTER THE EPIC EVENTS OF **THOR #235**, OF COURSE. --ARCH.
THEN YOU MUST **USE** IT, CHILD!
I...? BUT--
THERE IS **NO OTHER!** YOU HAVE PROVEN **ABLE** TO WIELD THE MADMAN'S **STAFF!**
THE STRANGER WILL ADD WHAT REMAINS OF **HIS** POWER TO YOUR **OWN!**
FOR MY OWN **EXISTENCE** HANGS IN THE **BALANCE** AS WELL AS THAT OF **EARTH!** AND I CHOOSE TO **LIVE**, WOMAN--
--WHATEVER BE THE **COST!!**
AND AT THAT SAME SECOND...
LIES! THIS...IS... NOT...**HAPPENING!** IT'S... ALL--
--**LIES!**
ALL I HAVE TO DO IS **SHUT** MY EYES AND--
HOLY SMOKES! IT **WORKED!** YOU'RE ALL BACK --**ALIVE!**
US? BUT I THOUGHT **YOU**--
SAME HERE, 'TASHA! I SAW THE **ANGEL** GET IT **FIRST!**


YOU "SAW" WHAT I WISHED YOU TO SEE--AND I FED ON EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR GLORIOUS AGONY! BUT THE TIME FOR GAMES IS PAST! THE NEXT DEATH YOU FEEL --WILL BE YOUR OWN!
MISTER...
...THAT--
U-UKKK!
--IS WHAT YOU THINK!
SO MUCH FOR THAT! WHICH LEAVES THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION--
AYE, LAD! HOW ARE WE TO RETURN TO EARTH?
I--I THINK HE MEANT SOMETHING ELSE, HERCULES! MORE LIKE--
"--IS THERE AN EARTH TO RETURN TO?"
S-STRANGER? WHAT-WHAT IS HAPPENING TO-- TO ME...?
"YOU ARE ADDING THE POWER OF THE STAFF TO THE BOMB, CHILD--FORCING ITS GROWTH."
"GROWTH--? BUT I THOUGHT--?"
"UNDERSTAND--THE BOMB'S DANGER LIES NOT IN EXPANSION--BUT IN THE MOMENT WHEN IT CONTRACTS!
"BUT BY PUSHING IT TO GROW FASTER AND FARTHER--DRIVING IT TO ENGULF ENTIRE GALAXIES--
"--WE HAVE EXCEEDED ITS PROGRAMMING, DRIVEN IT MAD! IT WILL CONTINUE TO EXPAND FOREVER--"


"--ON INTO THAT GREAT NOTHINGNESS THAT IS THE COSMIC ALL!
HEY! YOU OKAY? YOU HEAR ME?
C'MON, HONEY! WAKE UP NOW!
WE'RE BACK--THANKS TO YOU!
THERE! SHE'S OPENING HER EYES! SHE'S GONNA BE ALL RIGHT!
THEN THE DANGER IS TRULY PAST! FAREWELL, YOUNG ONE! YOU HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH ABOUT THIS HUMAN THING CALLED --COURAGE!
HE--BEHIND HIM! THE CHAMPIONS ARE HOME!
YES--ALL OF US!
AND IN THE BATTLE'S AFTERMATH...
BOBBY? TAKE IT EASY, KID! I'LL CALL FOR A DOCTOR!
ASK HIM... WHAT'S GOOD ...FOR A CASE OF NEGLECT!
HOME? GUESS MAYBE IT IS, AT THAT!
LAYNIA--SOMEHOW WE OWE YOU FOR--
YOU HAVE GIVEN ME BELONGING! THAT IS ENOUGH!
YEAH...I WONDER IF WHAT I SAID TO THE WIDOW DURING THE FIGHT WAS ALL IN MY MIND, OR--
SOMETHING WRONG, HERCULES? YOU LOOK AWFULLY GLUM FOR SOMEONE WHO'S JUST HELPED SAVE THE WORLD!
'TIS...NOTHING, MILADY. ONLY A PASSING THOUGHT.
CAN HERCULES--HE WHO IS BOTH MAN GOD--SHARE IN THIS ...BELONGING?
NEXT: A BRAND NEW SUPER-VILLAIN, THE RETURN OF IVAN, AND MORE SHOCKS AND SURPRISES! YOU MUST SEE:
THE SINISTER CREATURE called SWARM!

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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
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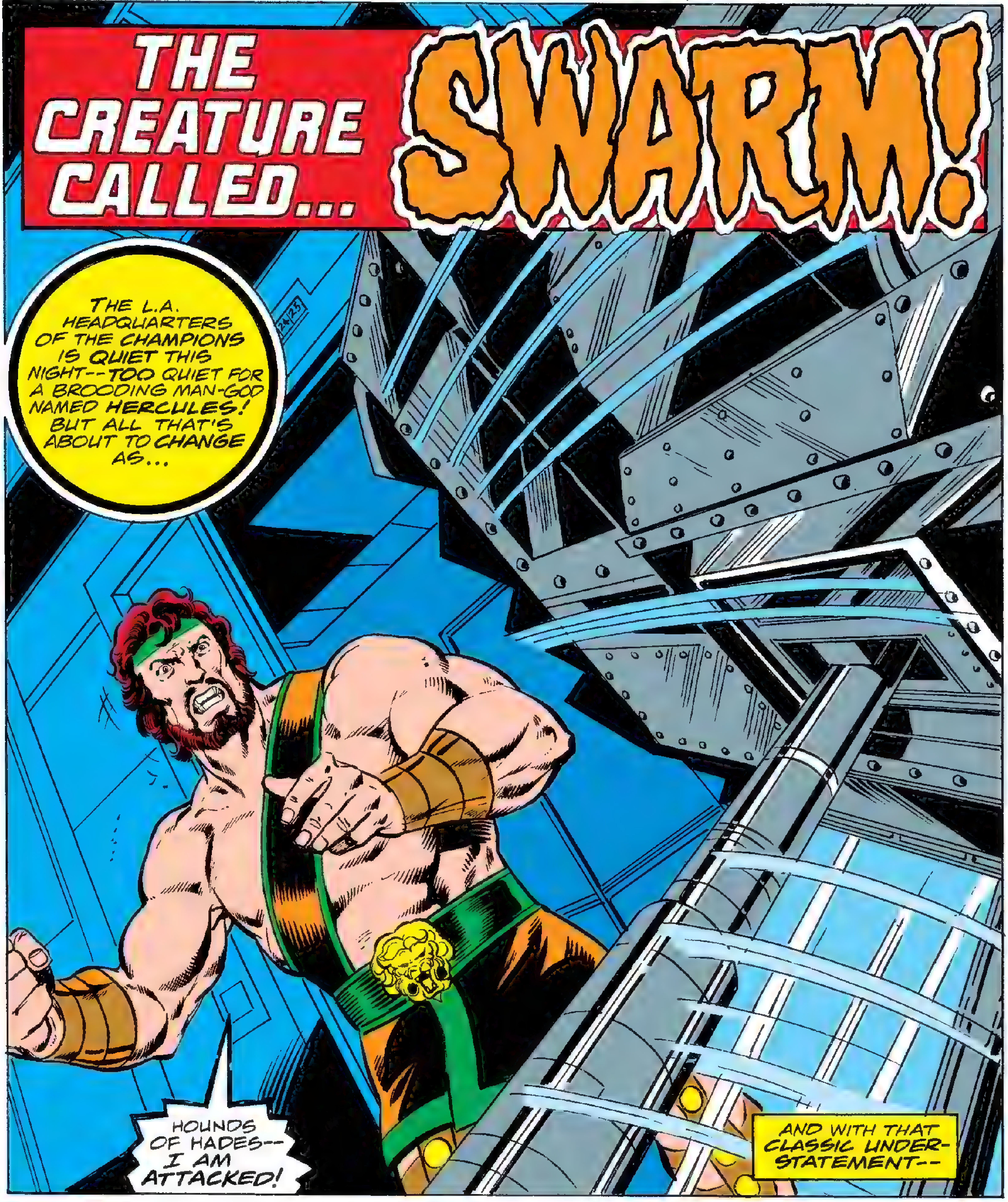
INTRODUCING — SWARM! LORD OF THE KILLER BEES!
NO USE, WIDOW! OUR COMBINED POWERS CAN'T STOP THAT HORDE! WE'VE GOT TO RETREAT!
INVASION!
LOS ANGELES TREMBLES AS TWO STRANGE MENACES DIVIDE THE CHAMPIONS!

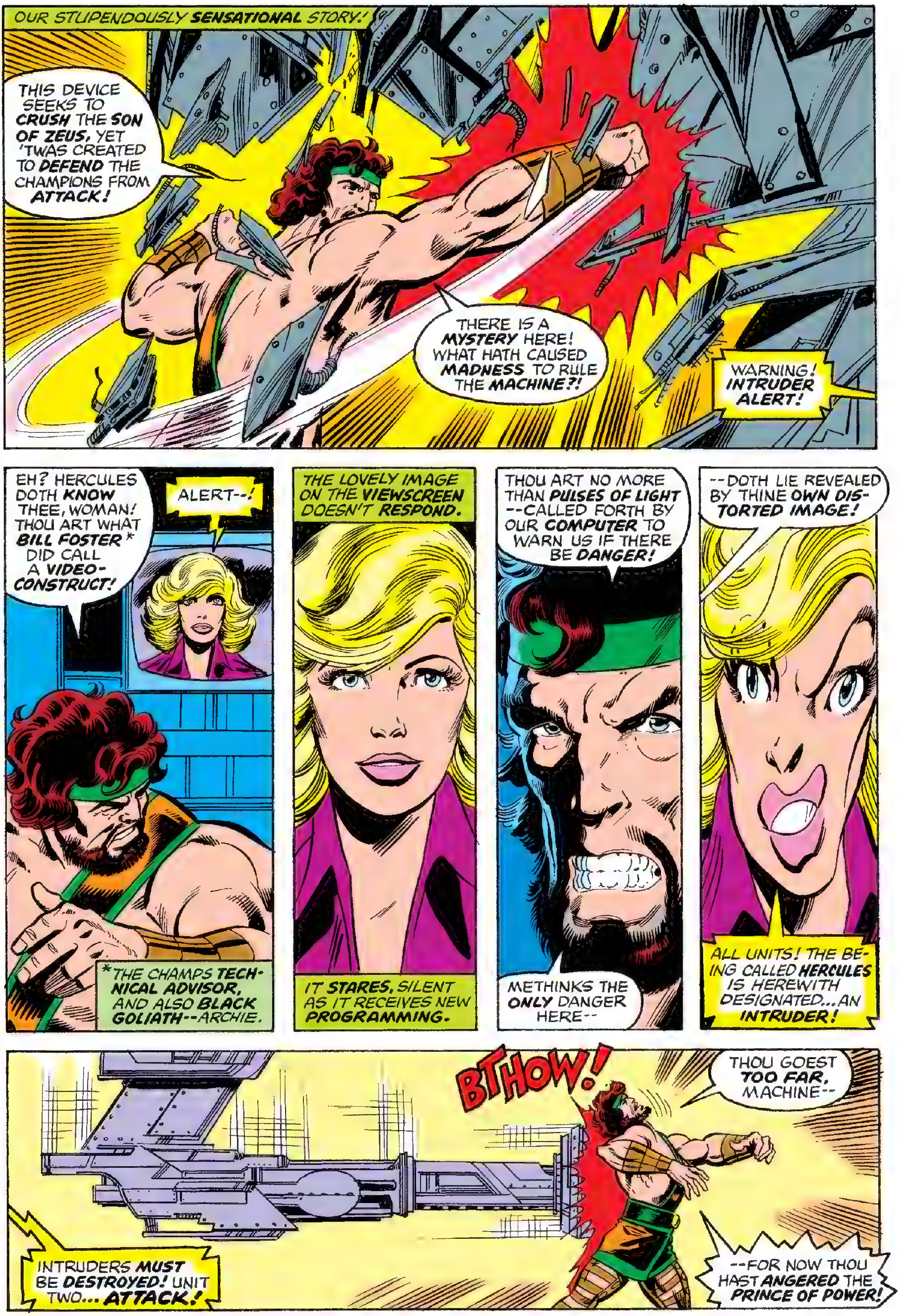
The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

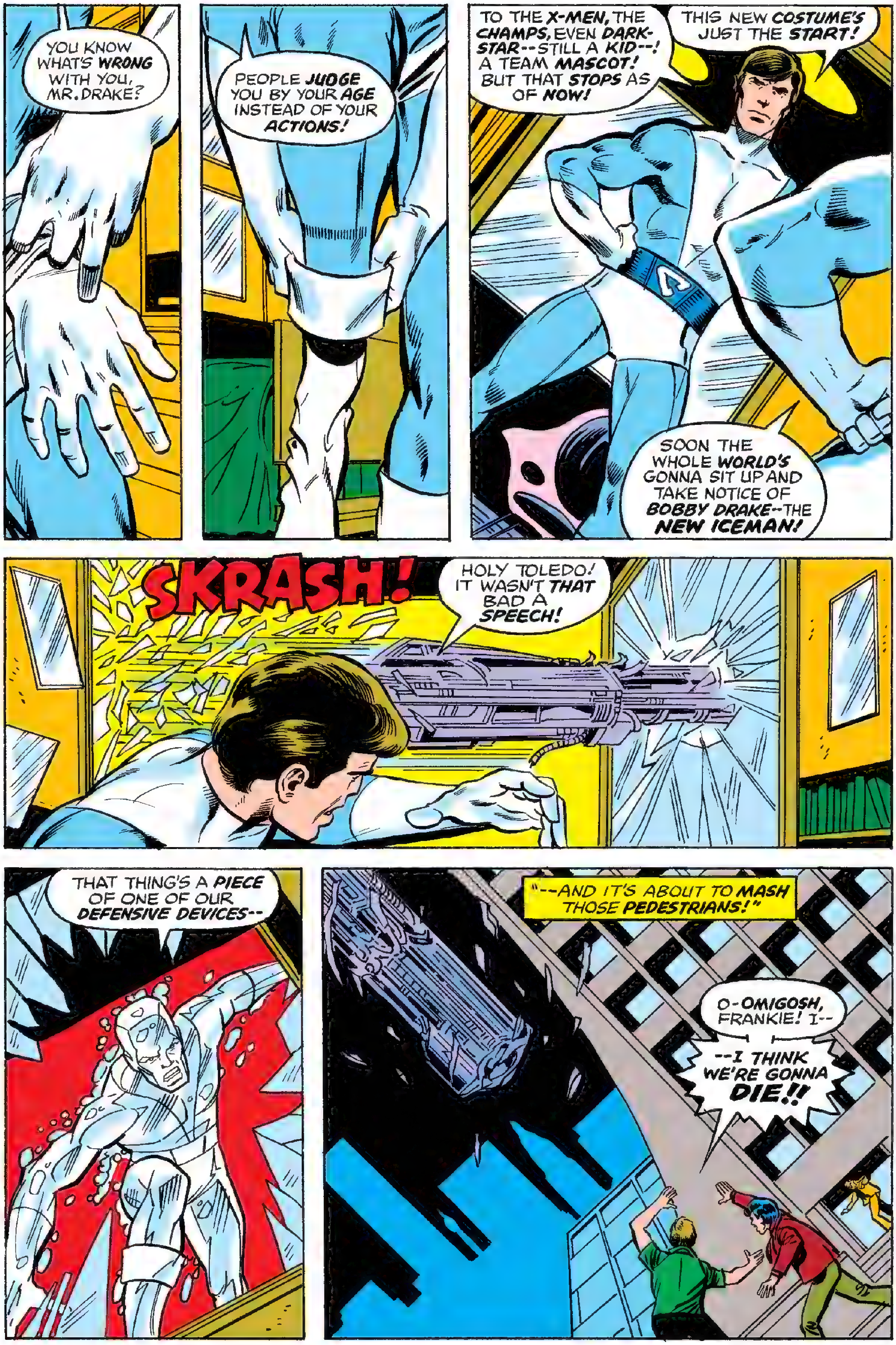
Stan Lee PRESENTS:

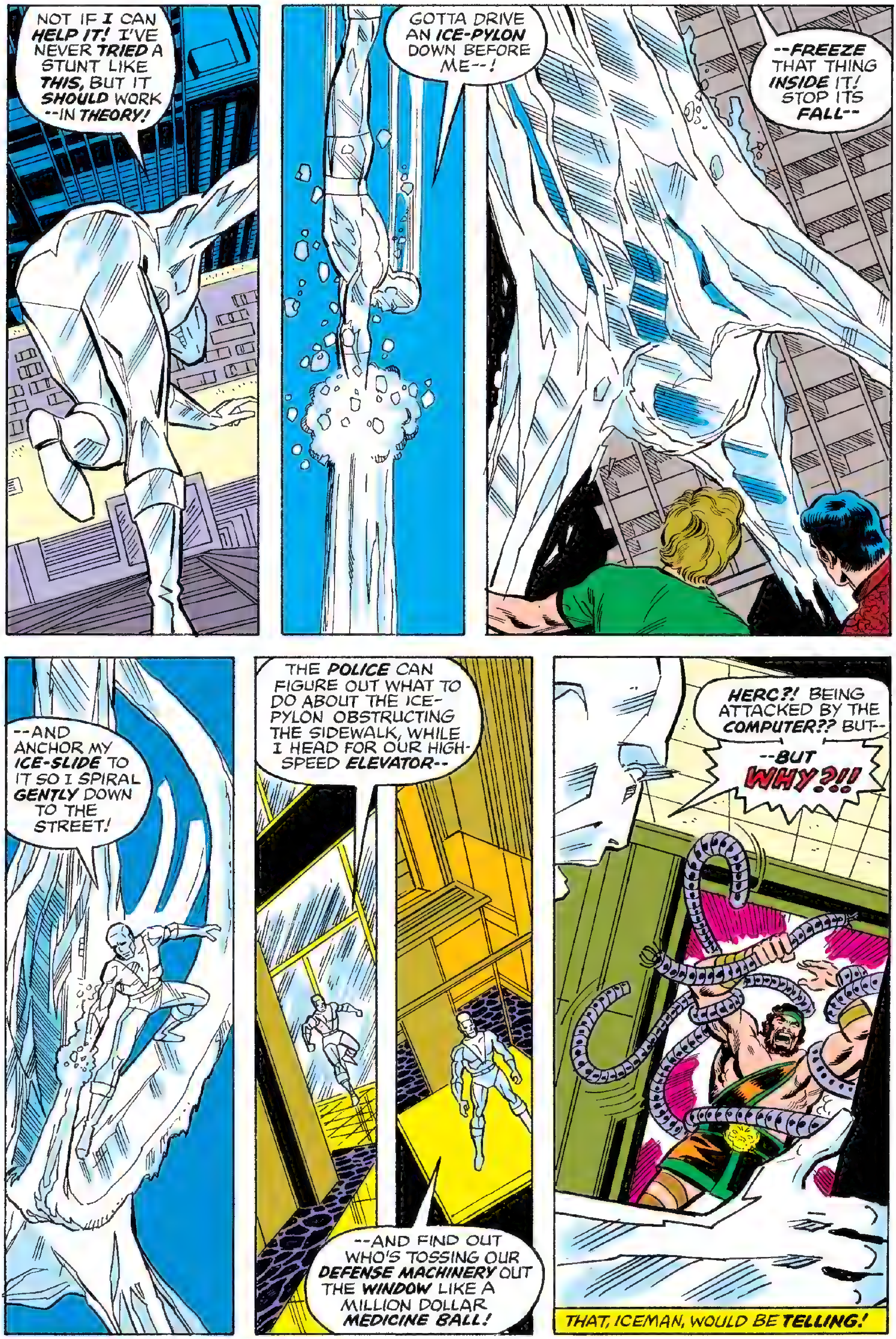
THE CHAMPIONS™

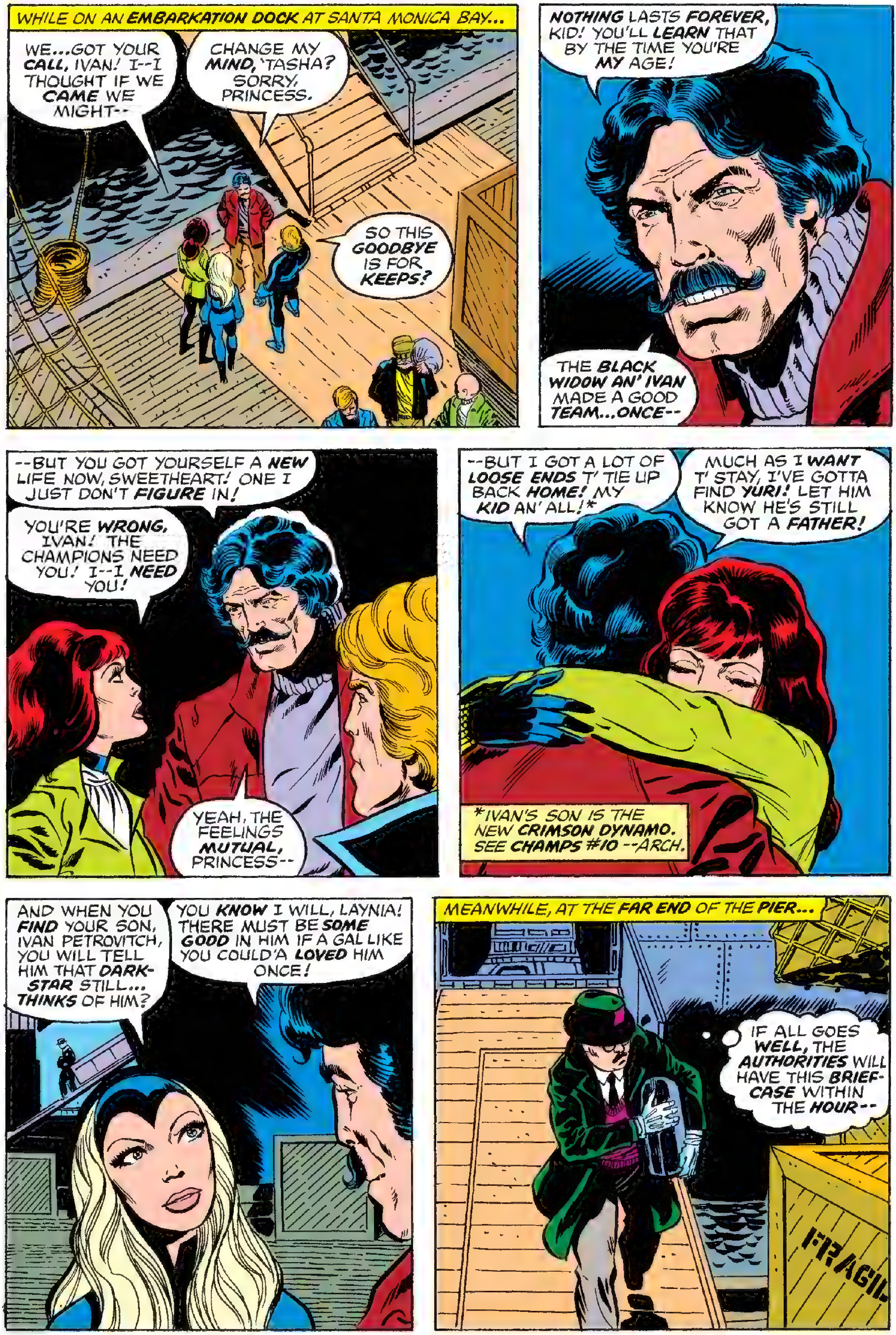
BILL MANTLO & JOHN BYRNE WRITER• STORYTELLERS• ARTIST / MIKE ESPOSITO INKER / IRV WATANABE, LETTERER GLYNIS WEIN, COLORIST / ARCHIE GOODWIN YE EDITOR

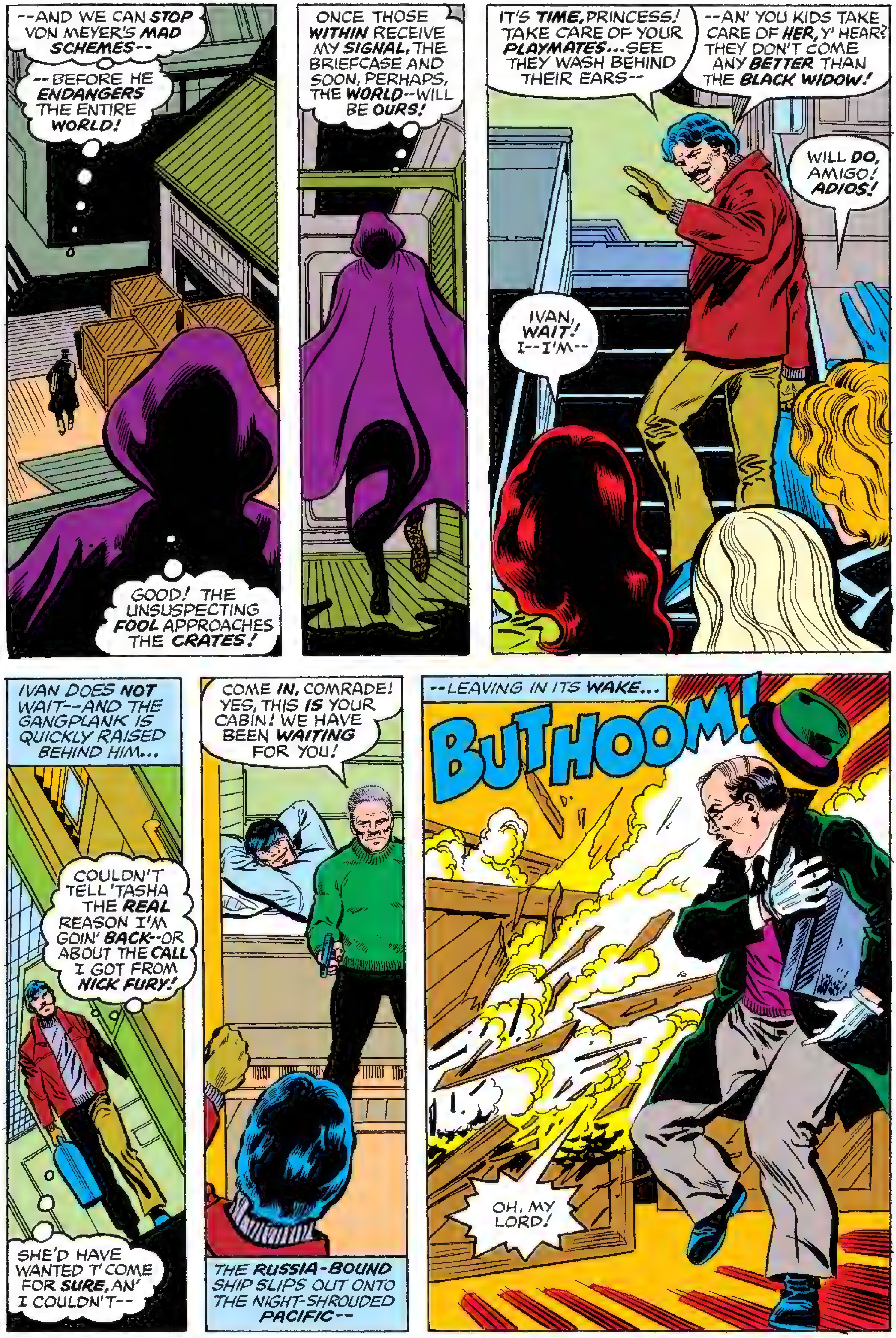

THE CREATURE CALLED... SWARM!
THE L.A. HEADQUARTERS OF THE CHAMPIONS IS QUIET THIS NIGHT--TOO QUIET FOR A BROODING MAN-GOD NAMED HERCULES! BUT ALL THAT'S ABOUT TO CHANGE AS...
HOUNDS OF HADES-- I AM ATTACKED!
AND WITH THAT CLASSIC UNDER-STATEMENT--

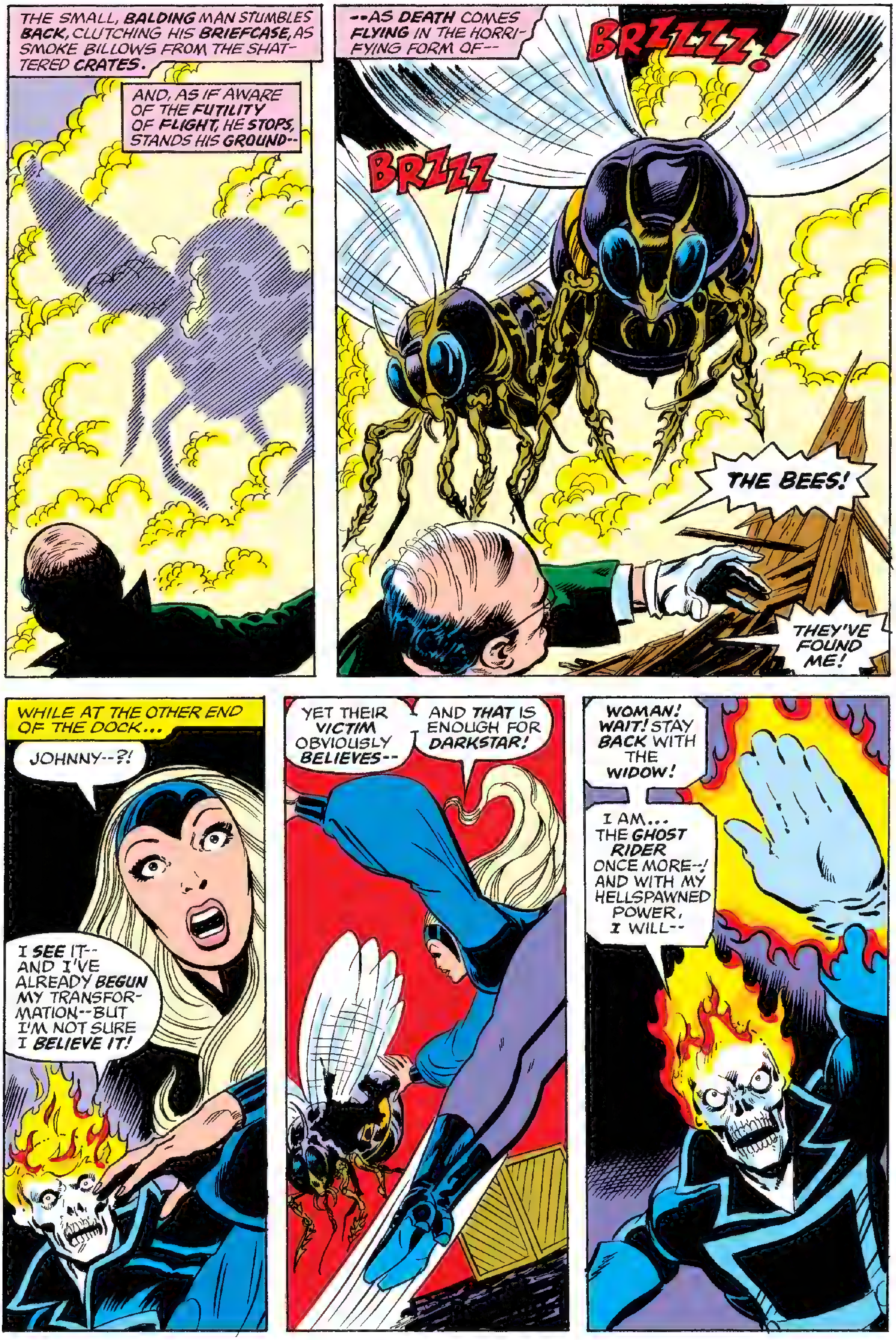

OUR STUPENDOUSLY SENSATIONAL STORY!
THIS DEVICE SEEKS TO CRUSH THE SON OF ZEUS, YET 'TWAS CREATED TO DEFEND THE CHAMPIONS FROM ATTACK!
THERE IS A MYSTERY HERE! WHAT HATH CAUSED MADNESS TO RULE THE MACHINE?!
WARNING! INTRUDER ALERT!
EH? HERCULES DOTH KNOW THEE, WOMAN! THOU ART WHAT BILL FOSTER* DID CALL A VIDEO-CONSTRUCT!
ALERT--!
*THE CHAMPS TECHNICAL ADVISOR, AND ALSO BLACK GOLIATH--ARCHIE.
THE LOVELY IMAGE ON THE VIEWSCREEN DOESN'T RESPOND.
IT STARES, SILENT AS IT RECEIVES NEW PROGRAMMING.
THOU ART NO MORE THAN PULSES OF LIGHT --CALLED FORTH BY OUR COMPUTER TO WARN US IF THERE BE DANGER!
METHINKS THE ONLY DANGER HERE--
--DOTH LIE REVEALED BY THINE OWN DISTORTED IMAGE!
ALL UNITS! THE BEING CALLED HERCULES IS HEREWITH DESIGNATED...AN INTRUDER!
BTHOW!
THOU GOEST TOO FAR, MACHINE--
INTRUDERS MUST BE DESTROYED! UNIT TWO... ATTACK!
--FOR NOW THOU HAST ANGERED THE PRINCE OF POWER!

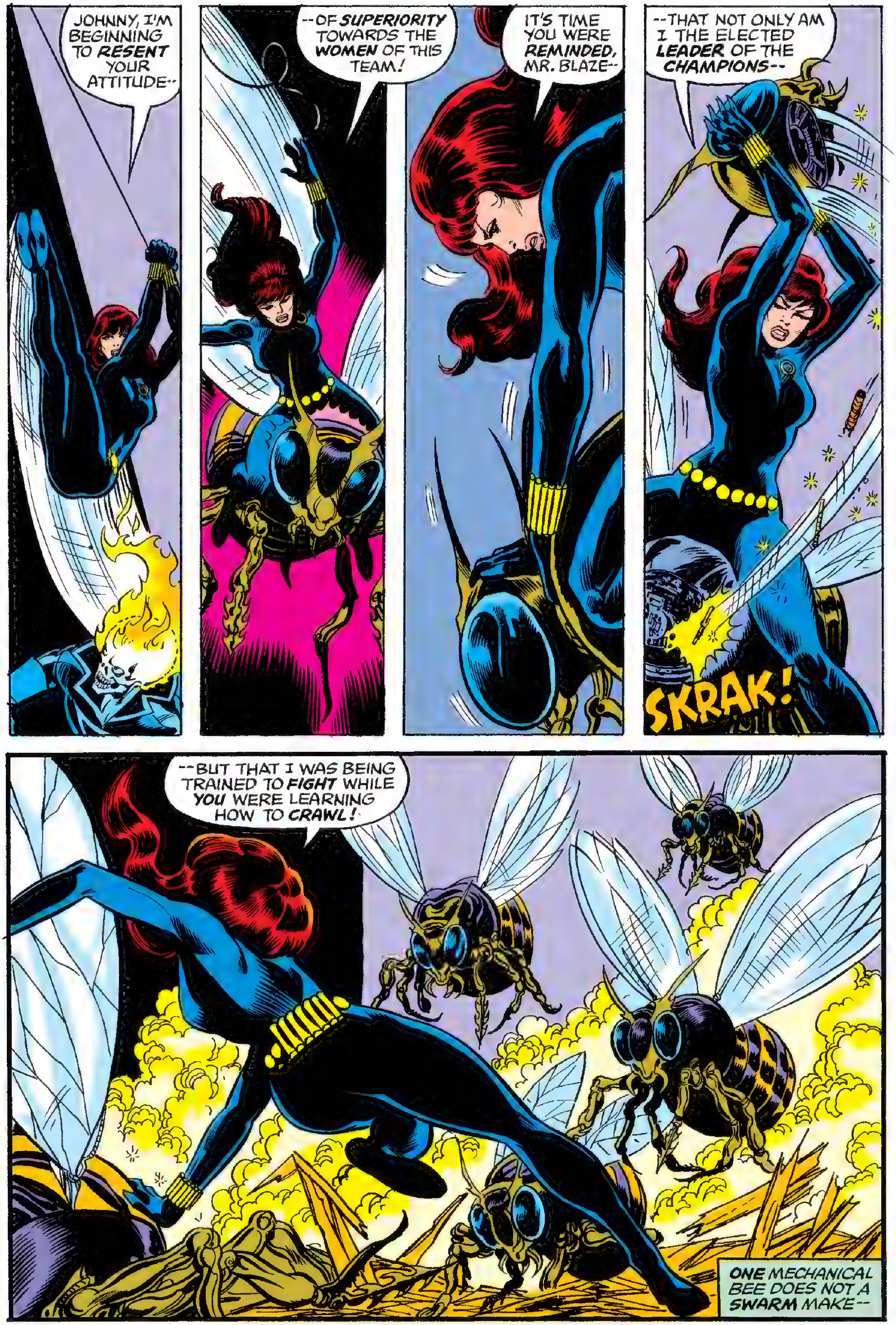

YOU KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, MR. DRAKE?
PEOPLE JUDGE YOU BY YOUR AGE INSTEAD OF YOUR ACTIONS!
TO THE X-MEN, THE CHAMPS, EVEN DARKSTAR--STILL A KID--! A TEAM MASCOT! BUT THAT STOPS AS OF NOW!
THIS NEW COSTUME'S JUST THE START!
SOON THE WHOLE WORLD'S GONNA SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE OF BOBBY DRAKE--THE NEW ICEMAN!
SKRASH!
HOLY TOLEDO! IT WASN'T THAT BAD A SPEECH!
THAT THING'S A PIECE OF ONE OF OUR DEFENSIVE DEVICES--
"--AND IT'S ABOUT TO MASH THOSE PEDESTRIANS!"
O-OMIGOSH, FRANKIE! I--
--I THINK WE'RE GONNA DIE!!

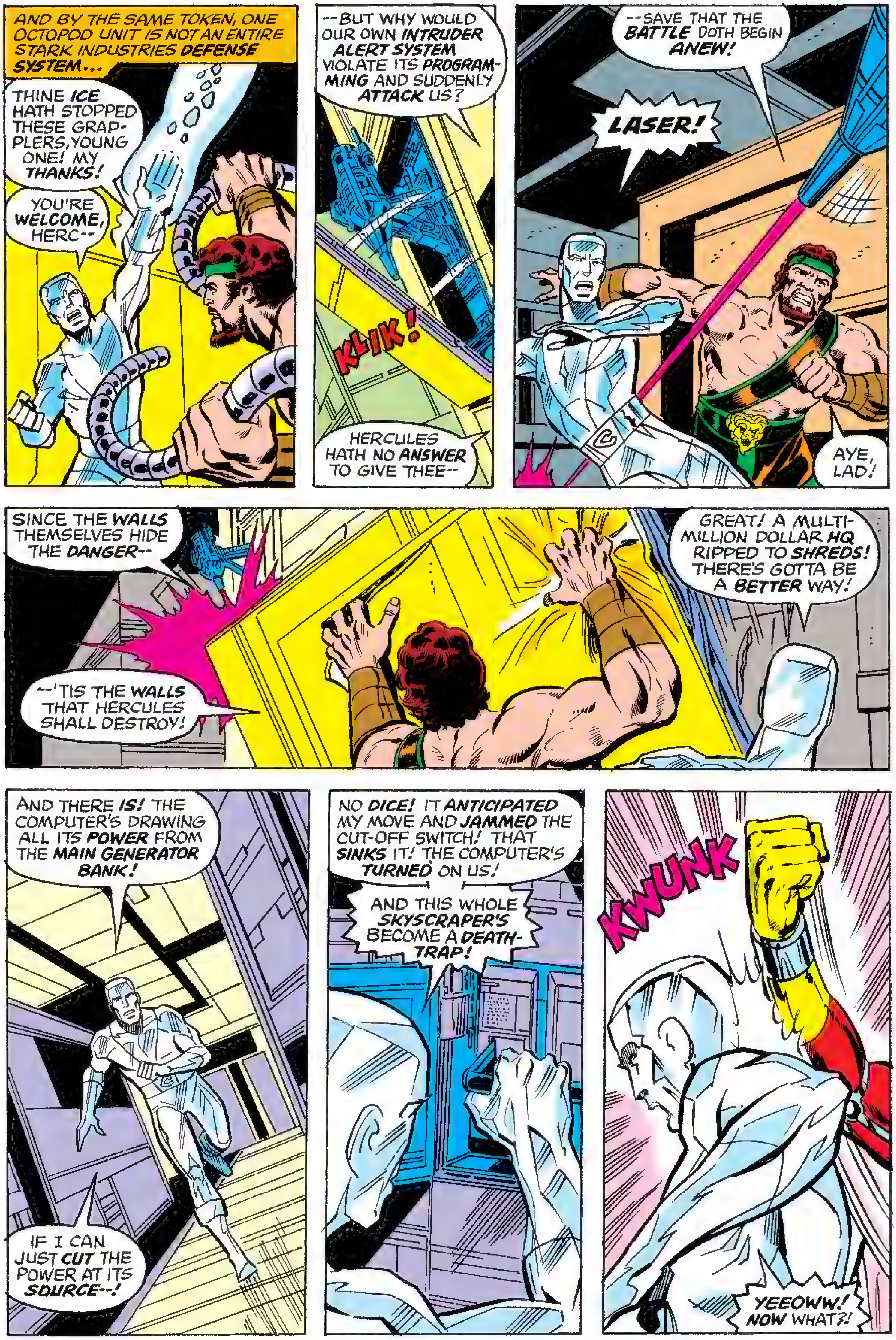

NOT IF I CAN HELP IT! I'VE NEVER TRIED A STUNT LIKE THIS, BUT IT SHOULD WORK --IN THEORY!
GOTTA DRIVE AN ICE-PYLON DOWN BEFORE ME--!
--FREEZE THAT THING INSIDE IT! STOP ITS FALL--
--AND ANCHOR MY ICE-SLIDE TO IT SO I SPIRAL GENTLY DOWN TO THE STREET!
THE POLICE CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ICE-PYLON OBSTRUCTING THE SIDEWALK, WHILE I HEAD FOR OUR HIGH-SPEED ELEVATOR--
--AND FIND OUT WHO'S TOSSING OUR DEFENSE MACHINERY OUT THE WINDOW LIKE A MILLION DOLLAR MEDICINE BALL!
HERC?! BEING ATTACKED BY THE COMPUTER?? BUT--
--BUT WHY?!!
THAT, ICEMAN, WOULD BE TELLING!

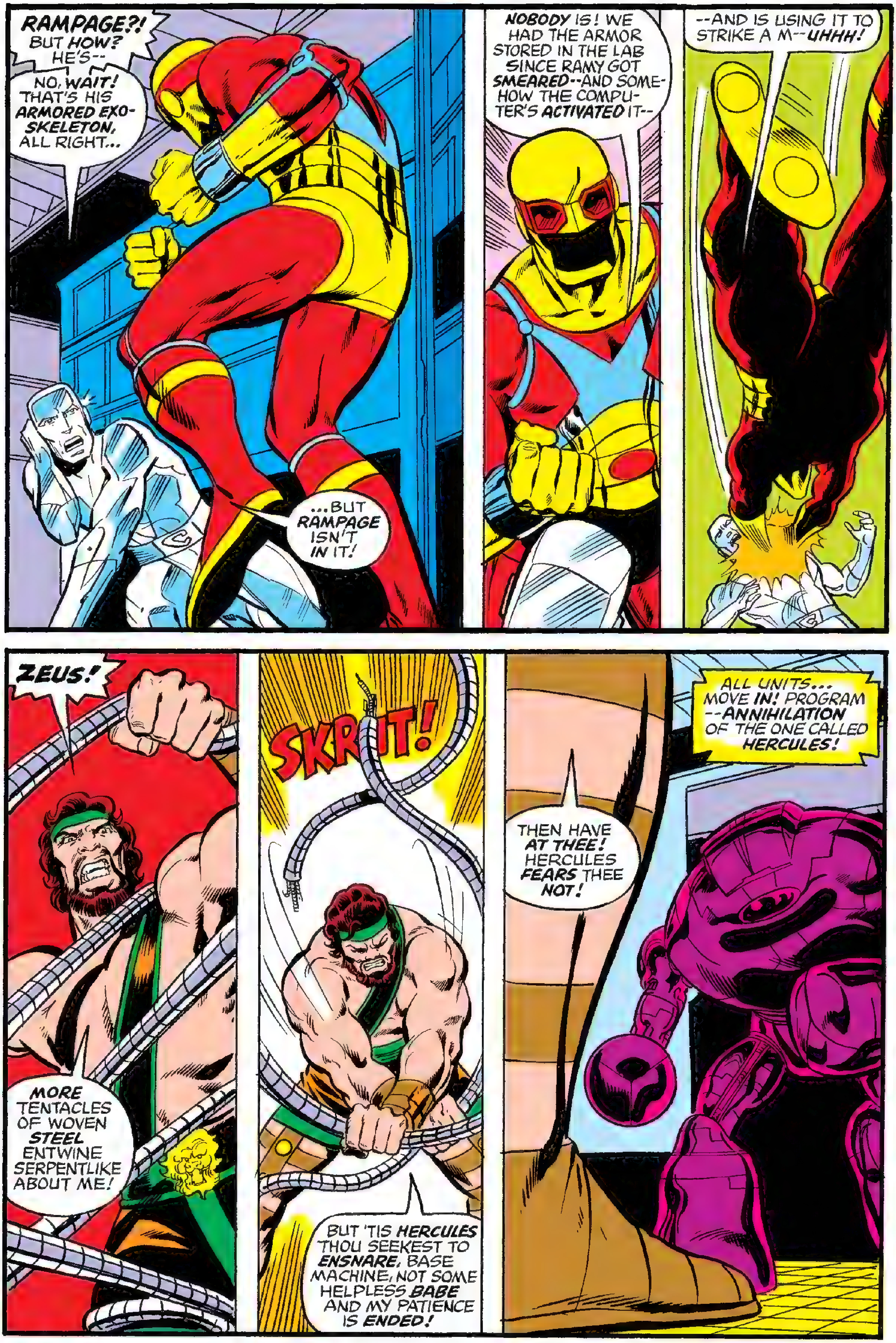

WHILE ON AN EMBARKATION DOCK AT SANTA MONICA BAY...
WE...GOT YOUR CALL, IVAN! I--I THOUGHT IF WE CAME WE MIGHT--
CHANGE MY MIND, 'TASHA? SORRY, PRINCESS.
SO THIS GOODBYE IS FOR KEEPS?
NOTHING LASTS FOREVER, KID! YOU'LL LEARN THAT BY THE TIME YOU'RE MY AGE!
THE BLACK WIDOW AN' IVAN MADE A GOOD TEAM...ONCE--
--BUT YOU GOT YOURSELF A NEW LIFE NOW, SWEETHEART! ONE I JUST DON'T FIGURE IN!
YOU'RE WRONG, IVAN! THE CHAMPIONS NEED YOU! I--I NEED YOU!
YEAH, THE FEELING'S MUTUAL, PRINCESS--
--BUT I GOT A LOT OF LOOSE ENDS T' TIE UP BACK HOME! MY KID AN' ALL!*
MUCH AS I WANT T' STAY, I'VE GOTTA FIND YURI! LET HIM KNOW HE'S STILL GOT A FATHER!
*IVAN'S SON IS THE NEW CRIMSON DYNAMO. SEE CHAMPS #10 --ARCH.
AND WHEN YOU FIND YOUR SON, IVAN PETROVITCH, YOU WILL TELL HIM THAT DARKSTAR STILL... THINKS OF HIM?
YOU KNOW I WILL, LAYNIA! THERE MUST BE SOME GOOD IN HIM IF A GAL LIKE YOU COULD'A LOVED HIM ONCE!
MEANWHILE, AT THE FAR END OF THE PIER...
IF ALL GOES WELL, THE AUTHORITIES WILL HAVE THIS BRIEFCASE WITHIN THE HOUR--
FRAGIL

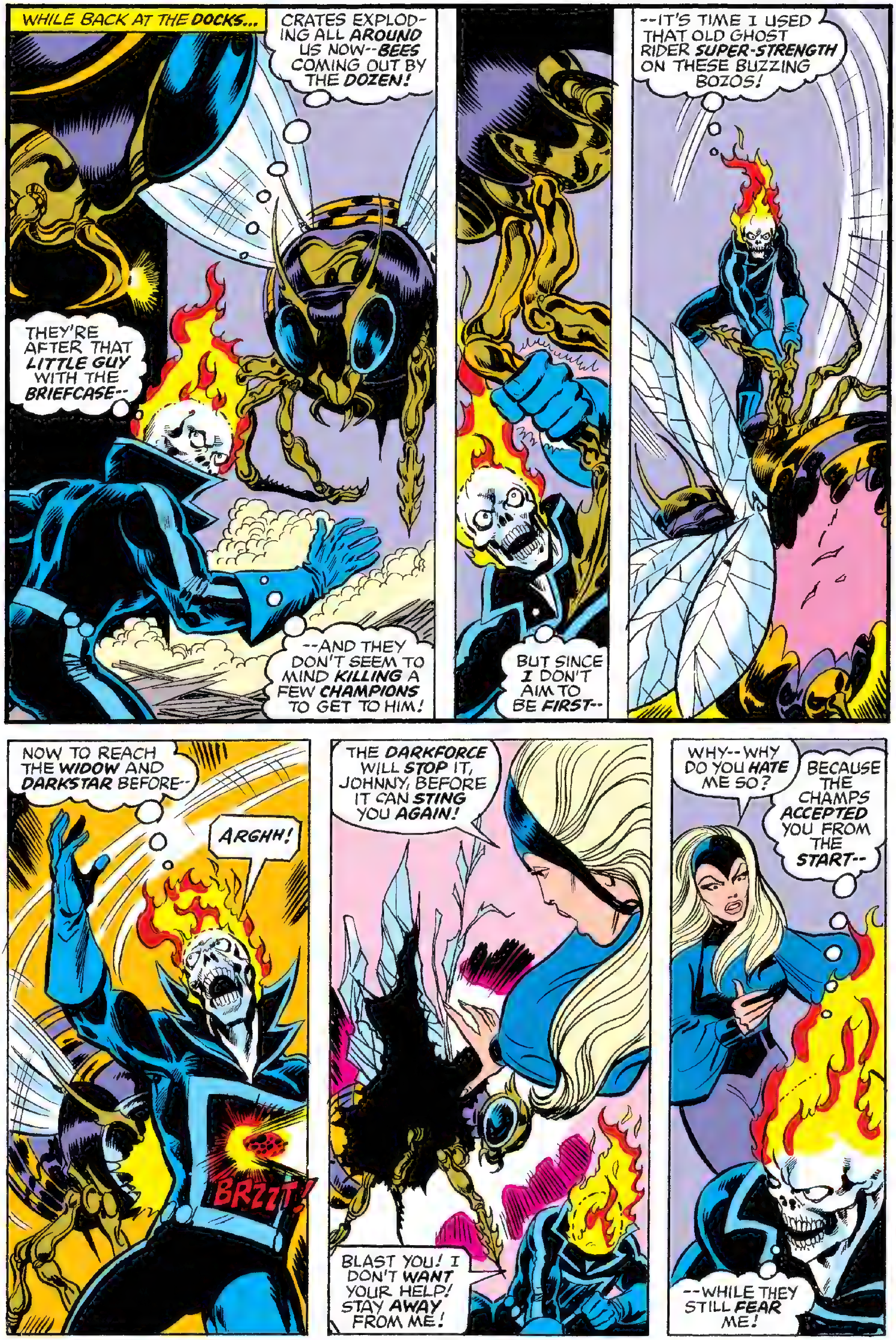

--AND WE CAN STOP VON MEYER'S MAD SCHEMES--
--BEFORE HE ENDANGERS THE ENTIRE WORLD!
GOOD! THE UNSUSPECTING FOOL APPROACHES THE CRATES!
ONCE THOSE WITHIN RECEIVE MY SIGNAL, THE BRIEFCASE AND SOON, PERHAPS, THE WORLD--WILL BE OURS!
IT'S TIME, PRINCESS! TAKE CARE OF YOUR PLAYMATES...SEE THEY WASH BEHIND THEIR EARS--
--AN' YOU KIDS TAKE CARE OF HER, Y' HEAR? THEY DON'T COME ANY BETTER THAN THE BLACK WIDOW!
WILL DO, AMIGO! ADIOS!
IVAN, WAIT! I--I'M--
IVAN DOES NOT WAIT--AND THE GANGPLANK IS QUICKLY RAISED BEHIND HIM...
COULDN'T TELL 'TASHA THE REAL REASON I'M GOIN' BACK--OR ABOUT THE CALL I GOT FROM NICK FURY!
SHE'D HAVE WANTED T' COME FOR SURE, AN' I COULDN'T--
COME IN, COMRADE! YES, THIS IS YOUR CABIN! WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
THE RUSSIA-BOUND SHIP SLIPS OUT ONTO THE NIGHT-SHROUDED PACIFIC--
--LEAVING IN ITS WAKE...
BUTHOOM!
OH, MY LORD!

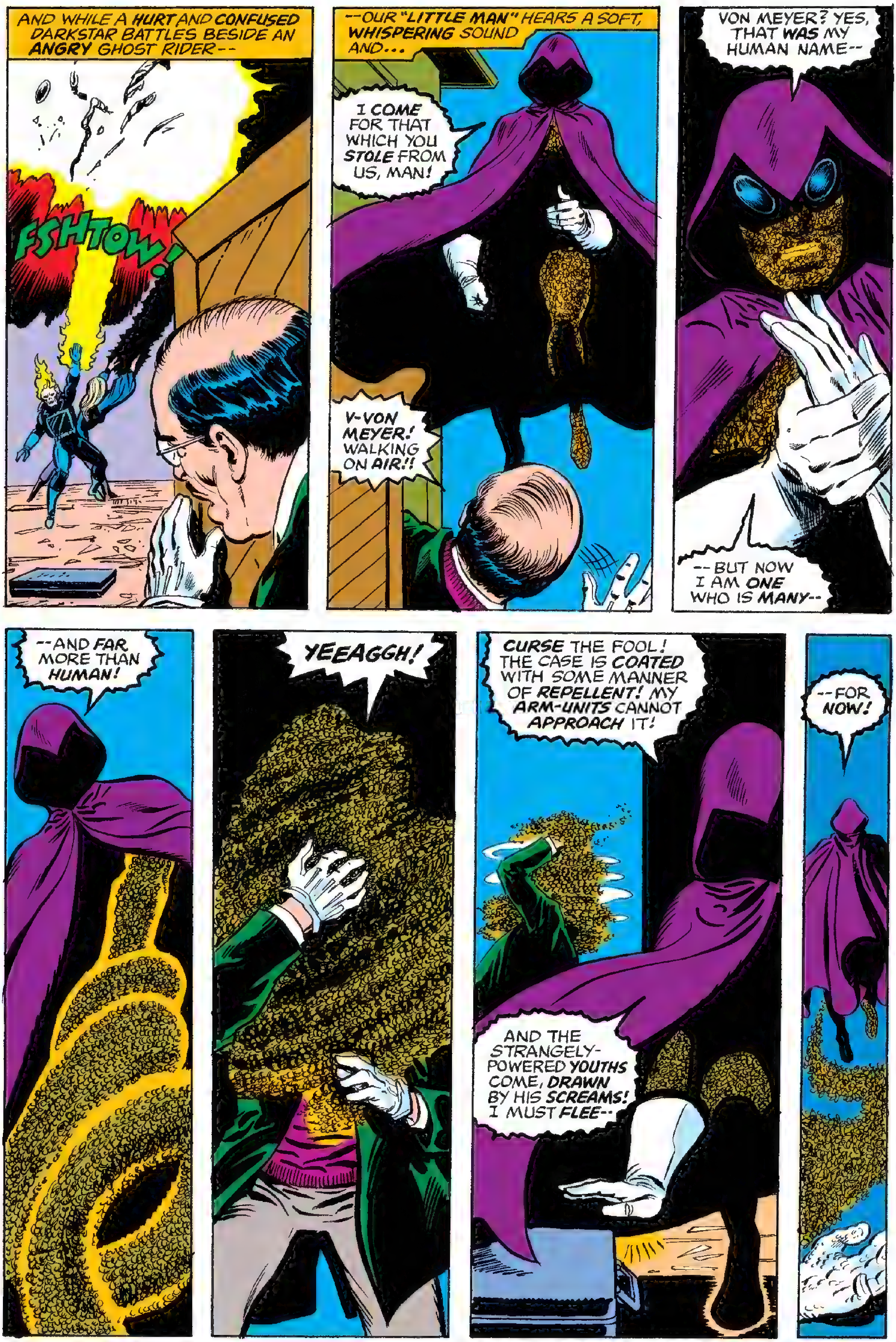

THE SMALL, BALDING MAN STUMBLES BACK, CLUTCHING HIS BRIEFCASE, AS SMOKE BILLOWS FROM THE SHATTERED CRATES.
AND, AS IF AWARE OF THE FUTILITY OF FLIGHT, HE STOPS, STANDS HIS GROUND--
--AS DEATH COMES FLYING IN THE HORRIFYING FORM OF--
BRZZZZ!
BRZZZ
THE BEES!
THEY'VE FOUND ME!
WHILE AT THE OTHER END OF THE DOCK...
JOHNNY--?!
I SEE IT--AND I'VE ALREADY BEGUN MY TRANSFORMATION--BUT I'M NOT SURE I BELIEVE IT!
YET THEIR VICTIM OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES--
AND THAT IS ENOUGH FOR DARKSTAR!
WOMAN! WAIT! STAY BACK WITH THE WIDOW!
I AM... THE GHOST RIDER ONCE MORE--! AND WITH MY HELLSPAWNED POWER, I WILL--

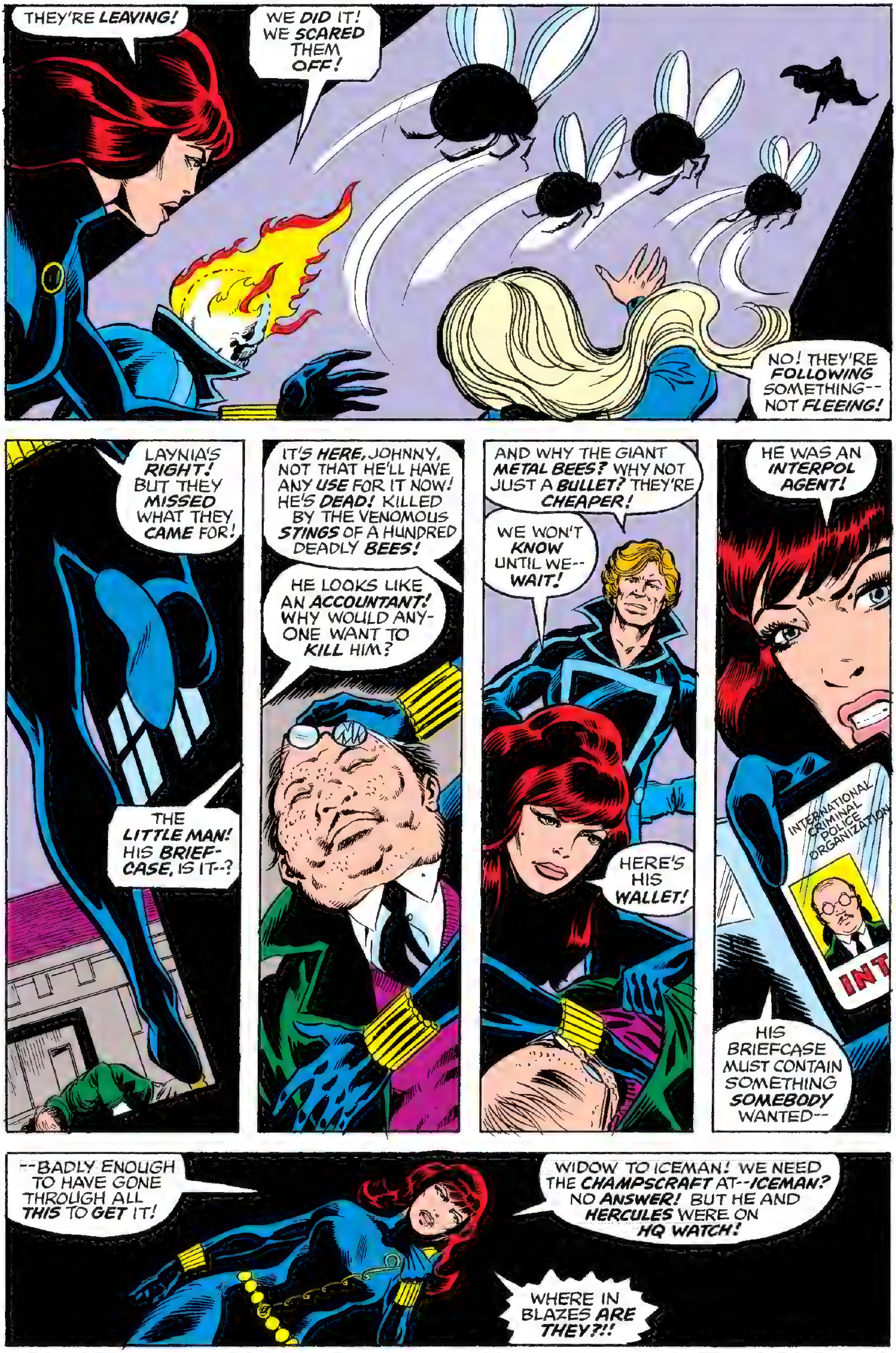

JOHNNY, I'M BEGINNING TO **RESENT** YOUR ATTITUDE--
--OF **SUPERIORITY** TOWARDS THE **WOMEN** OF THIS TEAM!
IT'S TIME YOU WERE **REMINDED,** MR. BLAZE--
--THAT NOT ONLY AM I THE ELECTED **LEADER** OF THE **CHAMPIONS**--
SKRAK!
--BUT THAT I WAS BEING TRAINED TO **FIGHT** WHILE **YOU** WERE LEARNING HOW TO **CRAWL!**
ONE MECHANICAL BEE DOES NOT A **SWARM** MAKE--

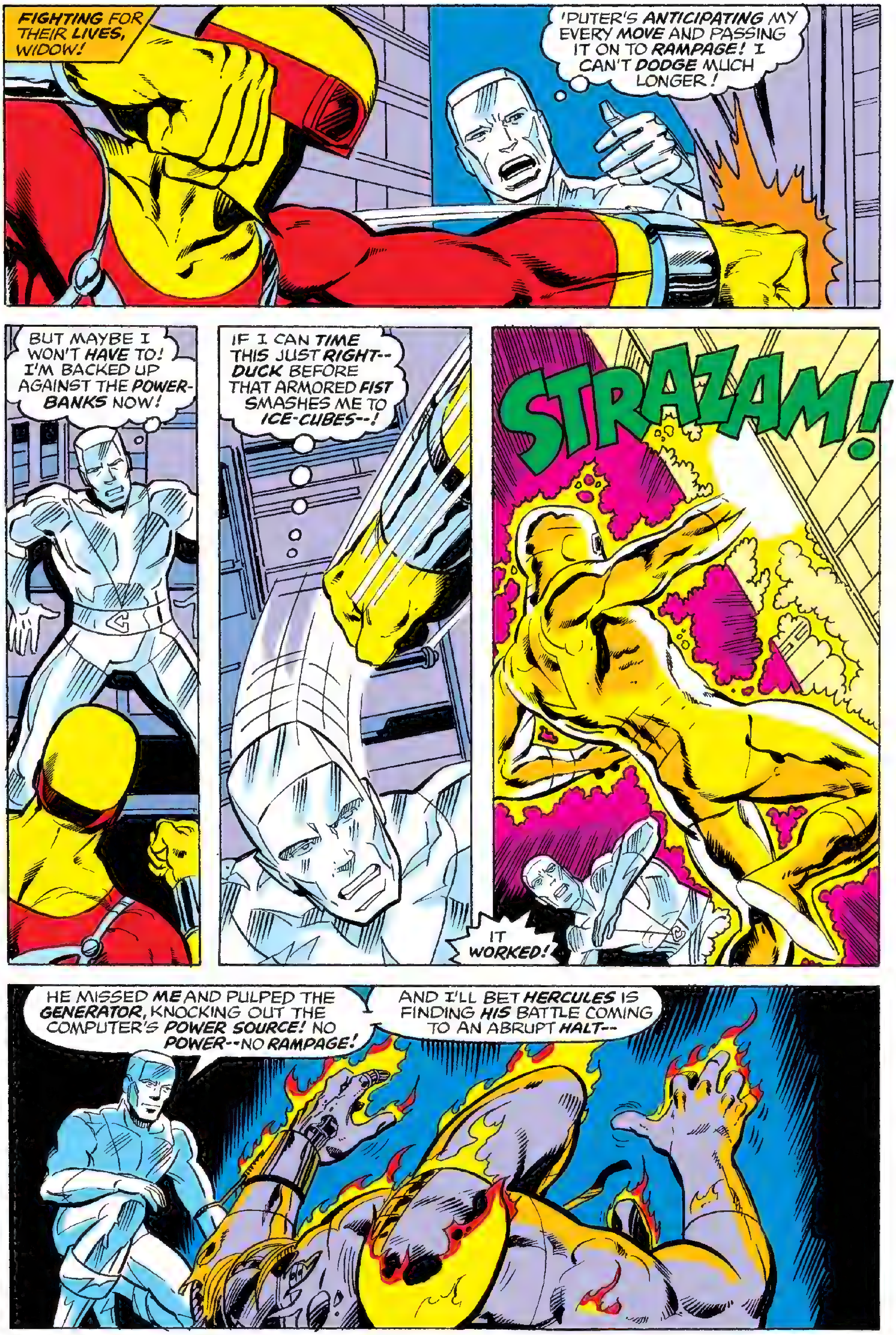

AND BY THE SAME TOKEN, ONE OCTOPOD UNIT IS NOT AN ENTIRE STARK INDUSTRIES DEFENSE SYSTEM...
THINE ICE HATH STOPPED THESE GRAPPLERS, YOUNG ONE! MY THANKS!
YOU'RE WELCOME, HERC--
--BUT WHY WOULD OUR OWN INTRUDER ALERT SYSTEM VIOLATE ITS PROGRAMMING AND SUDDENLY ATTACK US?
KLIK!
HERCULES HATH NO ANSWER TO GIVE THEE--
--SAVE THAT THE BATTLE DOTH BEGIN ANEW!
LASER!
AYE, LAD!
SINCE THE WALLS THEMSELVES HIDE THE DANGER--
--'TIS THE WALLS THAT HERCULES SHALL DESTROY!
GREAT! A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR HQ RIPPED TO SHREDS! THERE'S GOTTA BE A BETTER WAY!
AND THERE IS! THE COMPUTER'S DRAWING ALL ITS POWER FROM THE MAIN GENERATOR BANK!
IF I CAN JUST CUT THE POWER AT ITS SOURCE--!
NO DICE! IT ANTICIPATED MY MOVE AND JAMMED THE CUT-OFF SWITCH! THAT SINKS IT! THE COMPUTER'S TURNED ON US!
AND THIS WHOLE SKYSCRAPER'S BECOME A DEATH-TRAP!
KWUNK
YEEOWW! NOW WHAT?!

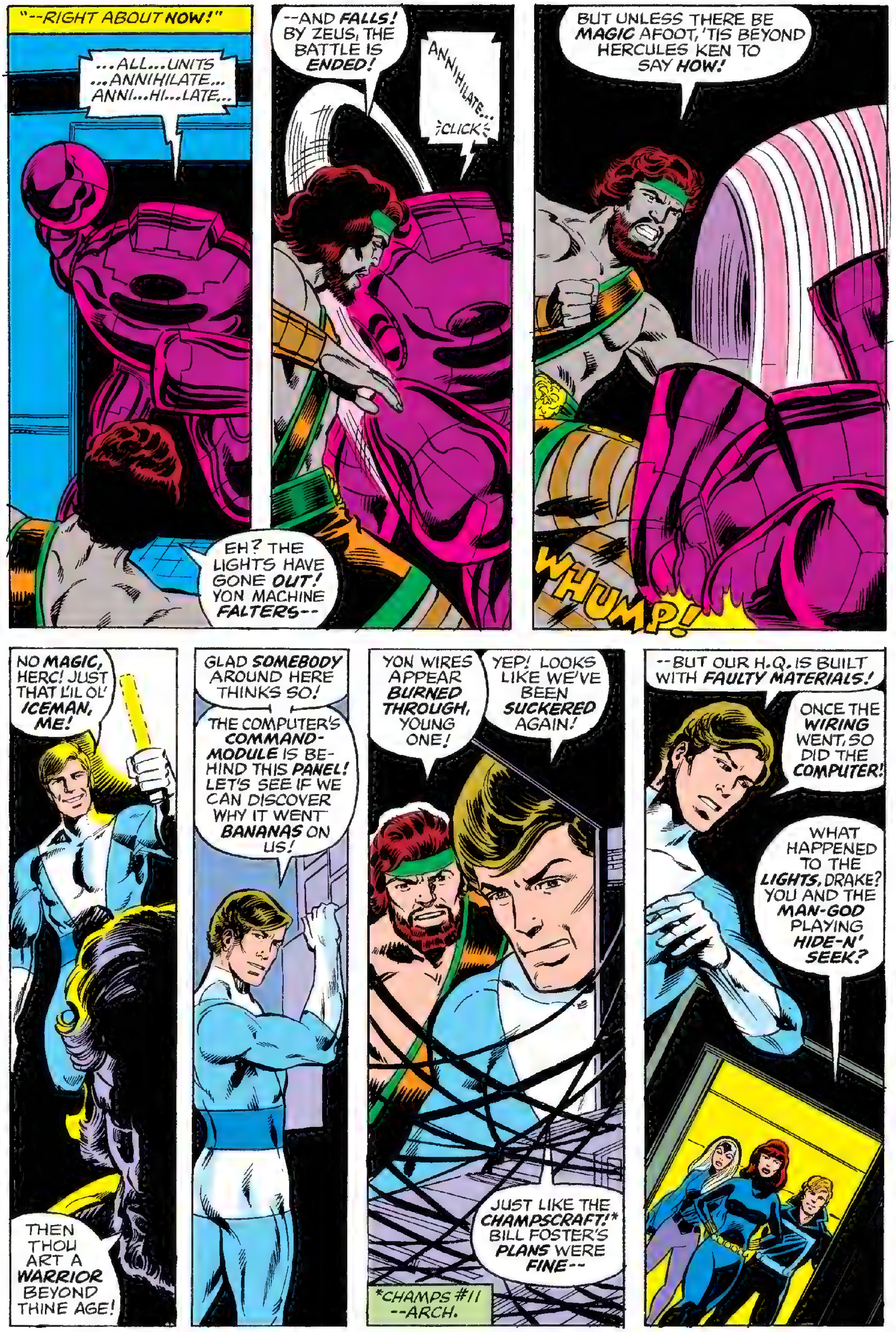

RAMPAGE?! BUT HOW? HE'S--
NO, WAIT! THAT'S HIS ARMORED EXO-SKELETON, ALL RIGHT...
...BUT RAMPAGE ISN'T IN IT!
NOBODY IS! WE HAD THE ARMOR STORED IN THE LAB SINCE RAMY GOT SMEARED--AND SOMEHOW THE COMPUTER'S ACTIVATED IT--
--AND IS USING IT TO STRIKE A M--UHHH!
ZEUS!
MORE TENTACLES OF WOVEN STEEL ENTWINE SERPENTLIKE ABOUT ME!
SKRUNT!
BUT 'TIS HERCULES THOU SEEKEST TO ENSNARE, BASE MACHINE, NOT SOME HELPLESS BABE AND MY PATIENCE IS ENDED!
THEN HAVE AT THEE! HERCULES FEARS THEE NOT!
ALL UNITS... MOVE IN! PROGRAM --ANNIHILATION OF THE ONE CALLED HERCULES!

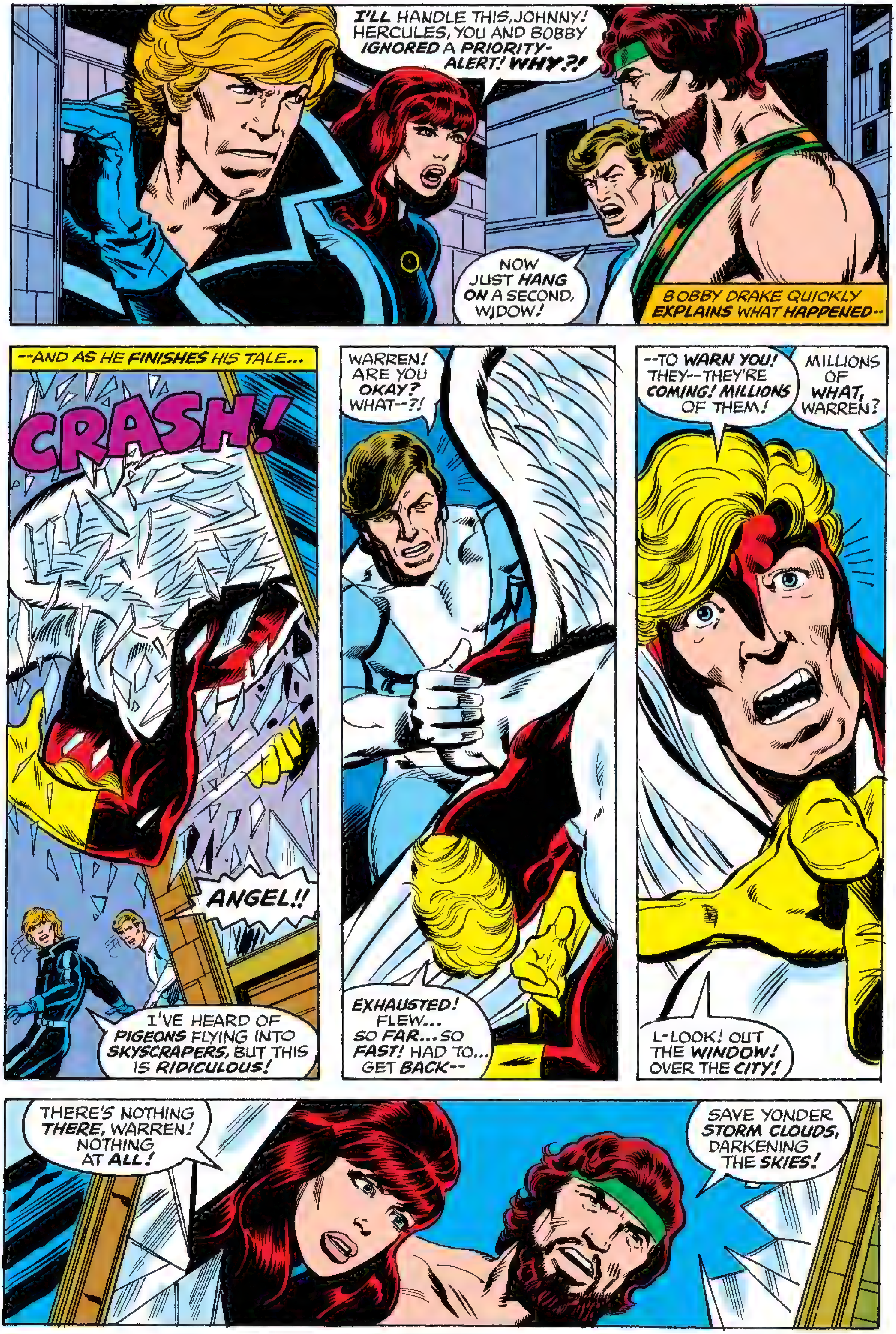

WHILE BACK AT THE DOCKS...
CRATES EXPLODING ALL AROUND US NOW--BEES COMING OUT BY THE DOZEN!
THEY'RE AFTER THAT LITTLE GUY WITH THE BRIEFCASE--
--AND THEY DON'T SEEM TO MIND KILLING A FEW CHAMPIONS TO GET TO HIM!
BUT SINCE I DON'T AIM TO BE FIRST--
--IT'S TIME I USED THAT OLD GHOST RIDER SUPER-STRENGTH ON THESE BUZZING BOZOS!
NOW TO REACH THE WIDOW AND DARKSTAR BEFORE--
ARGHH!
BRZZT!
THE DARKFORCE WILL STOP IT, JOHNNY, BEFORE IT CAN STING YOU AGAIN!
BLAST YOU! I DON'T WANT YOUR HELP! STAY AWAY FROM ME!
WHY--WHY DO YOU HATE ME SO?
BECAUSE THE CHAMPS ACCEPTED YOU FROM THE START--
--WHILE THEY STILL FEAR ME!

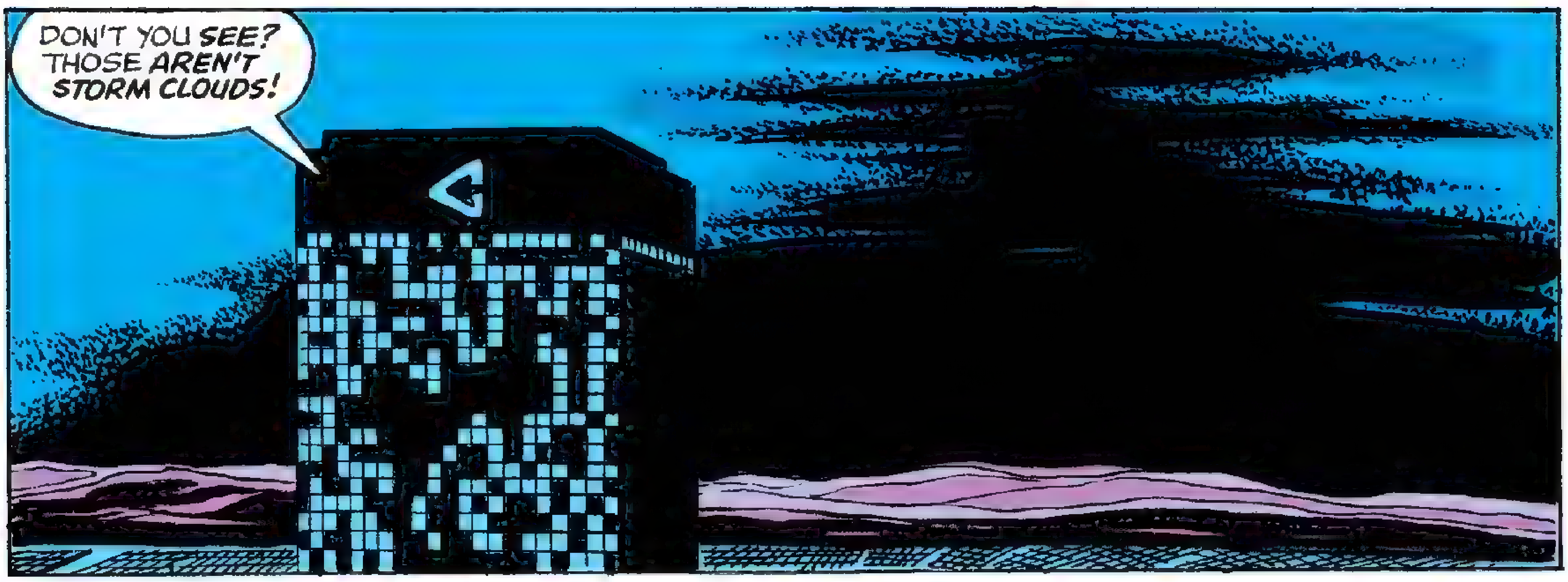

AND WHILE A HURT AND CONFUSED DARKSTAR BATTLES BESIDE AN ANGRY GHOST RIDER--
FSHTOW!
--OUR "LITTLE MAN" HEARS A SOFT, WHISPERING SOUND AND...
I COME FOR THAT WHICH YOU STOLE FROM US, MAN!
V-VON MEYER! WALKING ON AIR!!
VON MEYER? YES, THAT WAS MY HUMAN NAME--
--BUT NOW I AM ONE WHO IS MANY--
--AND FAR MORE THAN HUMAN!
YEEAGGH!
CURSE THE FOOL! THE CASE IS COATED WITH SOME MANNER OF REPELLENT! MY ARM-UNITS CANNOT APPROACH IT!
AND THE STRANGELY-POWERED YOUTHS COME, DRAWN BY HIS SCREAMS! I MUST FLEE--
--FOR NOW!

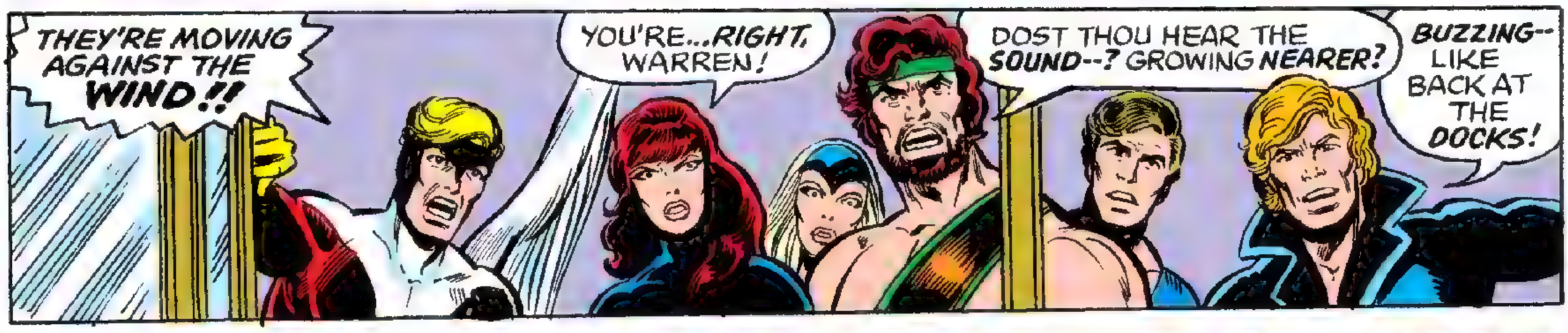

THEY'RE LEAVING!
WE DID IT! WE SCARED THEM OFF!
NO! THEY'RE FOLLOWING SOMETHING--NOT FLEEING!
LAYNIA'S RIGHT! BUT THEY MISSED WHAT THEY CAME FOR!
THE LITTLE MAN! HIS BRIEFCASE, IS IT--?
IT'S HERE, JOHNNY, NOT THAT HE'LL HAVE ANY USE FOR IT NOW! HE'S DEAD! KILLED BY THE VENOMOUS STINGS OF A HUNDRED DEADLY BEES!
HE LOOKS LIKE AN ACCOUNTANT! WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO KILL HIM?
AND WHY THE GIANT METAL BEES? WHY NOT JUST A BULLET? THEY'RE CHEAPER!
WE WON'T KNOW UNTIL WE--WAIT!
HERE'S HIS WALLET!
HE WAS AN INTERPOL AGENT!
INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL POLICE ORGANIZATION
INT
HIS BRIEFCASE MUST CONTAIN SOMETHING SOMEBODY WANTED--
--BADLY ENOUGH TO HAVE GONE THROUGH ALL THIS TO GET IT!
WIDOW TO ICEMAN! WE NEED THE CHAMPSCRAFT AT--ICEMAN? NO ANSWER! BUT HE AND HERCULES WERE ON HQ WATCH!
WHERE IN BLAZES ARE THEY?!!

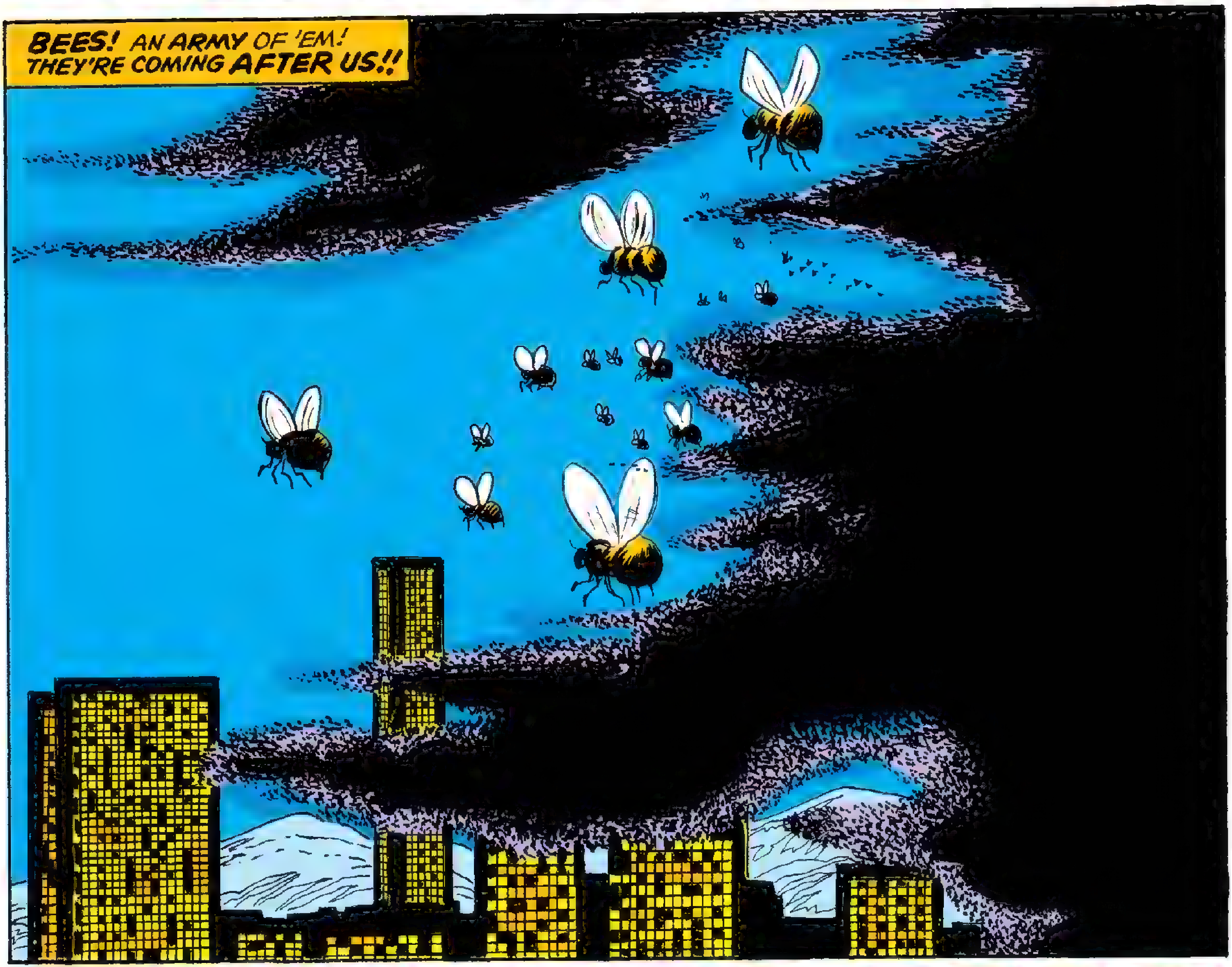

FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES, WIDOW!
'PUTER'S ANTICIPATING MY EVERY MOVE AND PASSING IT ON TO RAMPAGE! I CAN'T DODGE MUCH LONGER!
BUT MAYBE I WON'T HAVE TO! I'M BACKED UP AGAINST THE POWER-BANKS NOW!
IF I CAN TIME THIS JUST RIGHT-- DUCK BEFORE THAT ARMORED FIST SMASHES ME TO ICE-CUBES--!
STRAZAM!
IT WORKED!
HE MISSED ME AND PULPED THE GENERATOR, KNOCKING OUT THE COMPUTER'S POWER SOURCE! NO POWER--NO RAMPAGE!
AND I'LL BET HERCULES IS FINDING HIS BATTLE COMING TO AN ABRUPT HALT--


"--RIGHT ABOUT NOW!"
...ALL...UNITS ...ANNIHILATE... ANNI...HI...LATE...
EH? THE LIGHTS HAVE GONE OUT! YON MACHINE FALTERS--
--AND FALLS! BY ZEUS, THE BATTLE IS ENDED!
ANNIHILATE...
CLICK
BUT UNLESS THERE BE MAGIC AFOOT, 'TIS BEYOND HERCULES KEN TO SAY HOW!
WHUMP!
NO MAGIC, HERC! JUST THAT LI'L OL' ICEMAN, ME!
THEN THOU ART A WARRIOR BEYOND THINE AGE!
GLAD SOMEBODY AROUND HERE THINKS SO!
THE COMPUTER'S COMMAND-MODULE IS BEHIND THIS PANEL! LET'S SEE IF WE CAN DISCOVER WHY IT WENT BANANAS ON US!
YON WIRES APPEAR BURNED THROUGH, YOUNG ONE!
YEP! LOOKS LIKE WE'VE BEEN SUCKERED AGAIN!
JUST LIKE THE CHAMPSCRAFT!* BILL FOSTER'S PLANS WERE FINE--
*CHAMPS #11 --ARCH.
--BUT OUR H.Q. IS BUILT WITH FAULTY MATERIALS!
ONCE THE WIRING WENT, SO DID THE COMPUTER!
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LIGHTS, DRAKE? YOU AND THE MAN-GOD PLAYING HIDE-N' SEEK?


I'LL HANDLE THIS, JOHNNY! HERCULES, YOU AND BOBBY IGNORED A PRIORITY-ALERT! WHY?!
NOW JUST HANG ON A SECOND, WIDOW!
BOBBY DRAKE QUICKLY EXPLAINS WHAT HAPPENED--
--AND AS HE FINISHES HIS TALE...
CRASH!
ANGEL!!
I'VE HEARD OF PIGEONS FLYING INTO SKYSCRAPERS, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
WARREN! ARE YOU OKAY? WHAT--?!
EXHAUSTED! FLEW... SO FAR... SO FAST! HAD TO... GET BACK--
--TO WARN YOU! THEY--THEY'RE COMING! MILLIONS OF THEM!
MILLIONS OF WHAT, WARREN?
L-LOOK! OUT THE WINDOW! OVER THE CITY!
THERE'S NOTHING THERE, WARREN! NOTHING AT ALL!
SAVE YONDER STORM CLOUDS, DARKENING THE SKIES!


DON'T YOU SEE? THOSE AREN'T STORM CLOUDS!


THEY'RE MOVING AGAINST THE WIND!!
YOU'RE...RIGHT, WARREN!
DOST THOU HEAR THE SOUND--? GROWING NEARER?
BUZZING-- LIKE BACK AT THE DOCKS!


BEES! AN ARMY OF 'EM! THEY'RE COMING AFTER US!!

NEXT: **THE KILLER BEES!**

THE CHAMPS AT BAY! HERCULES UNLEASHED!

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DAY OF THE DEATH-DRONES!
THE CHAMPS' LAST STAND AGAINST SWARM, LORD OF THE KILLER BEES!

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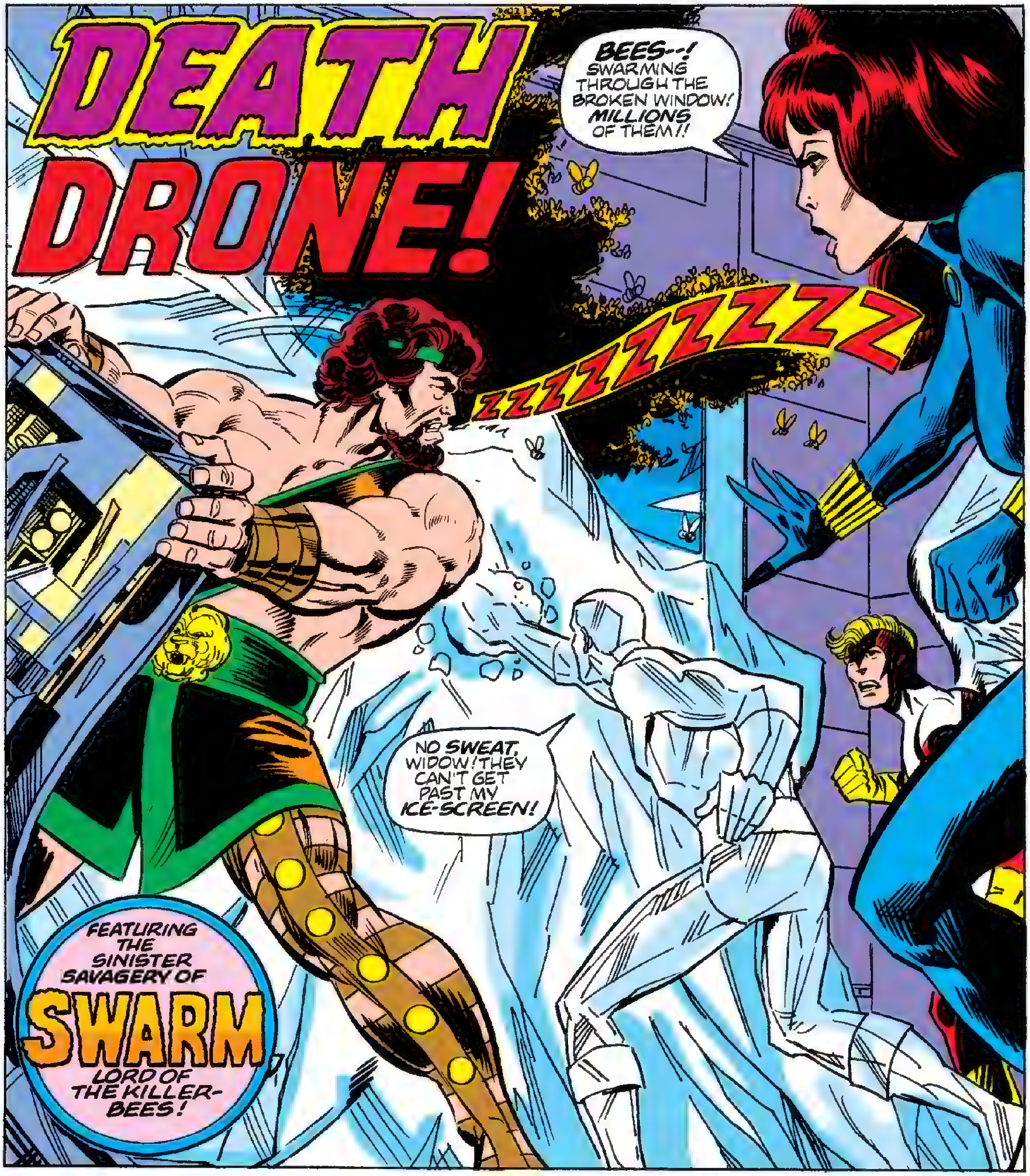
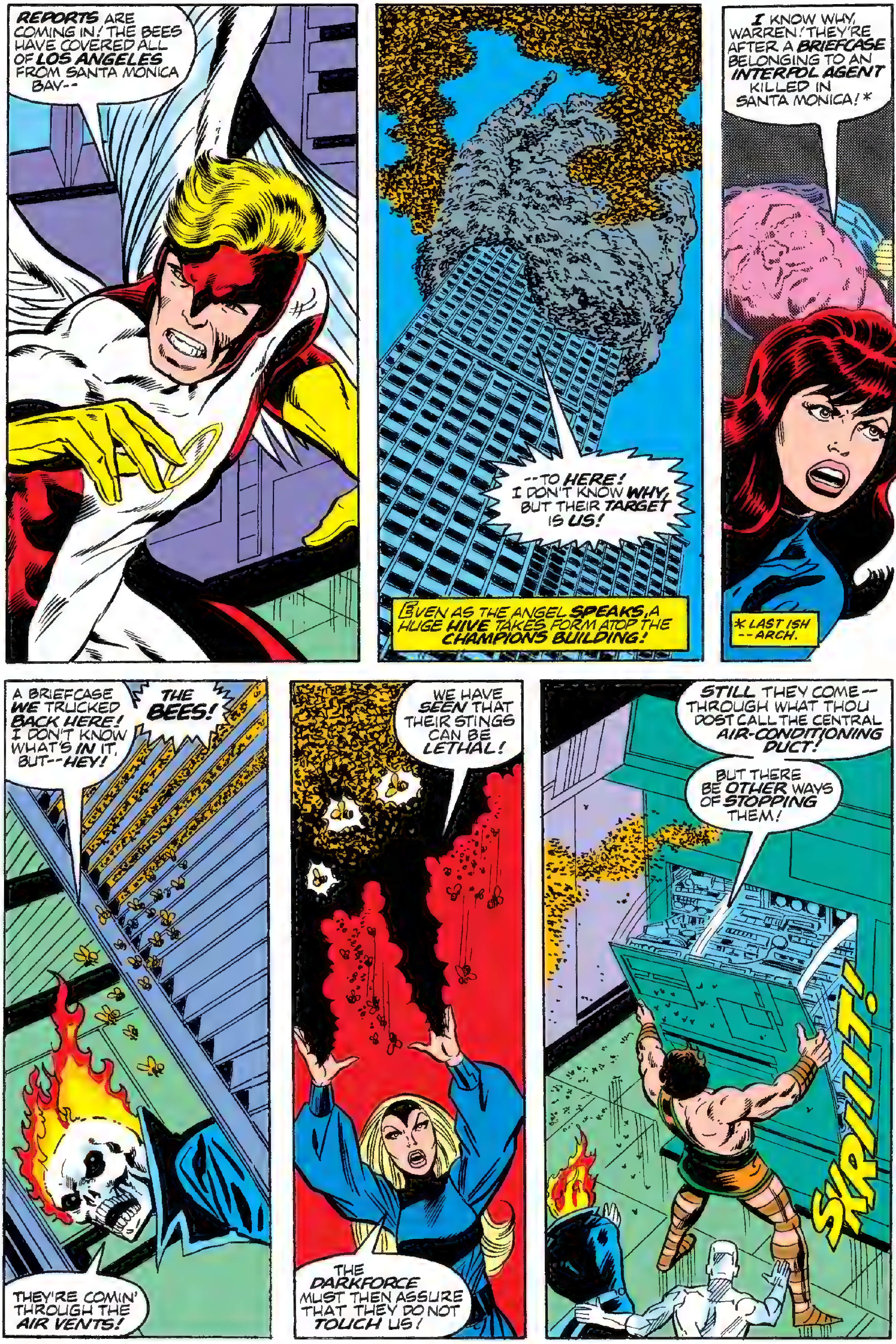
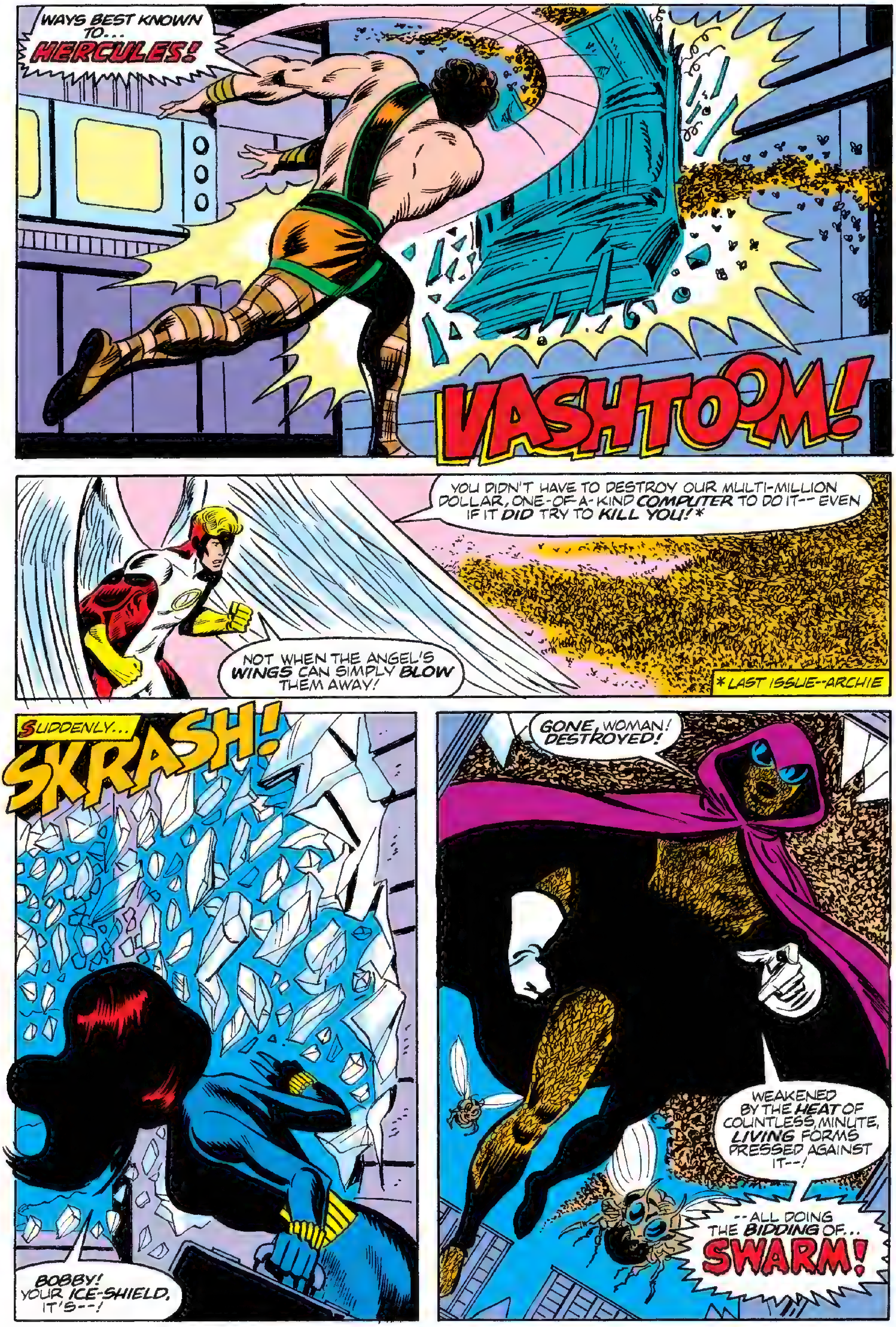
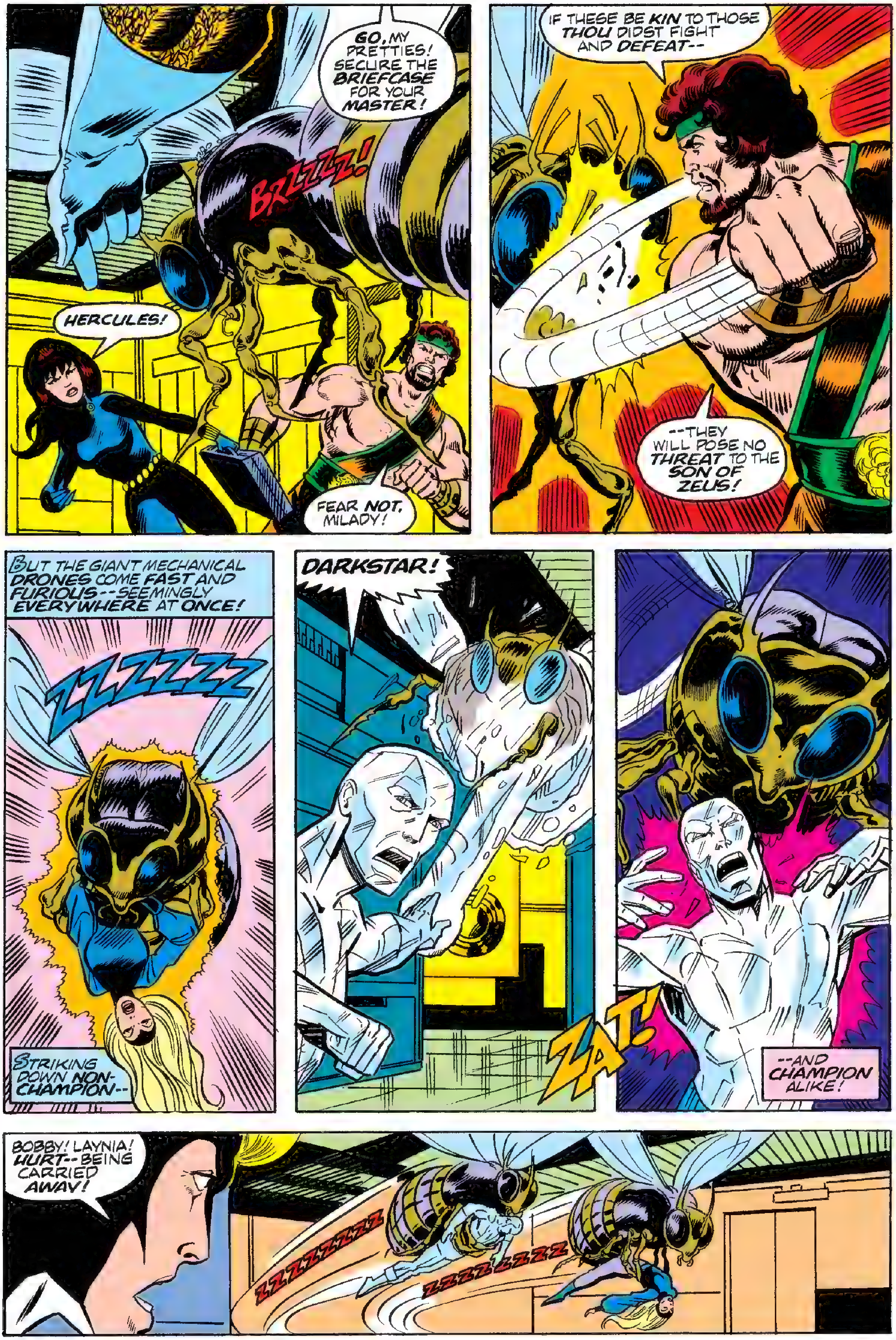
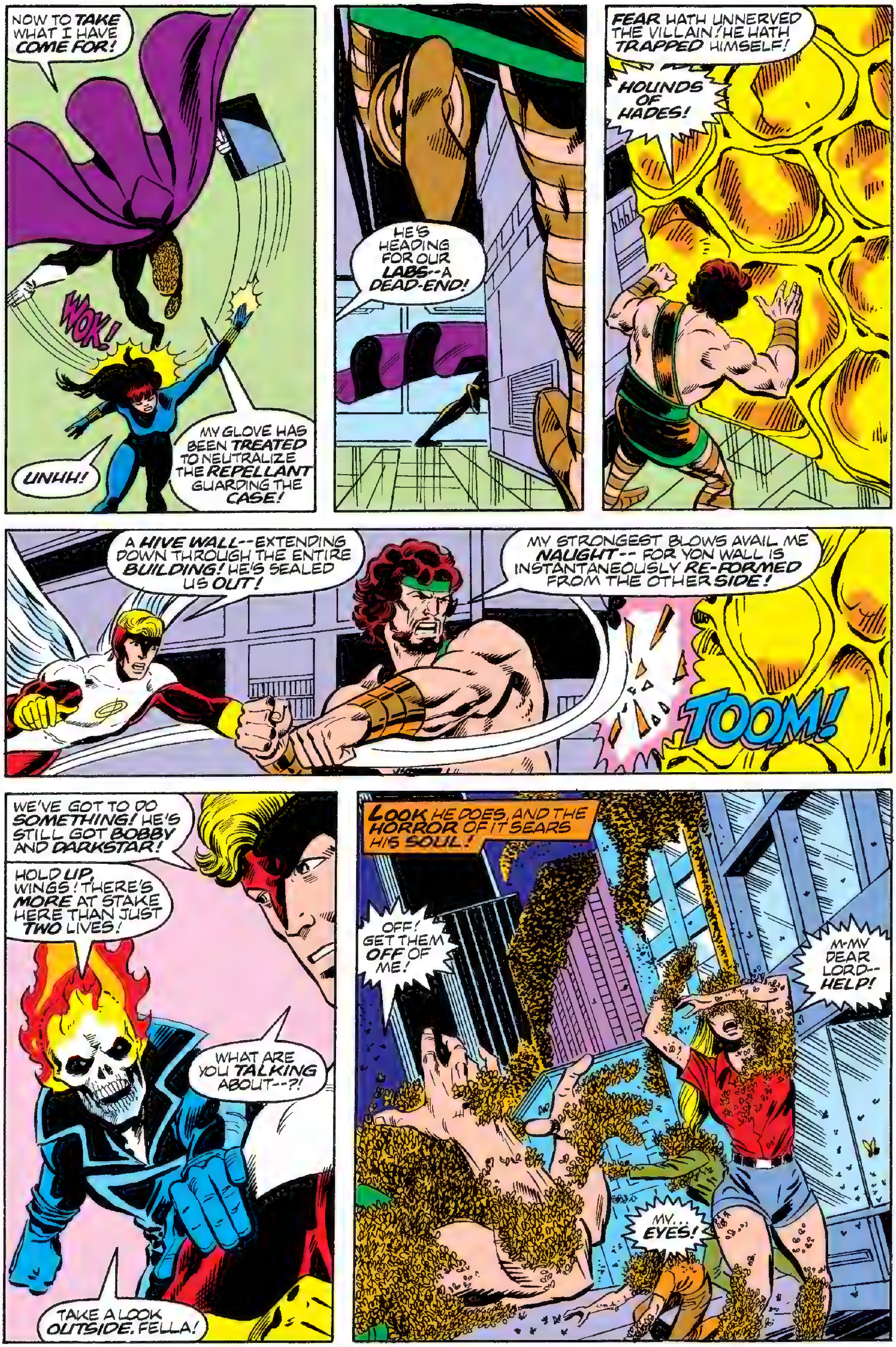
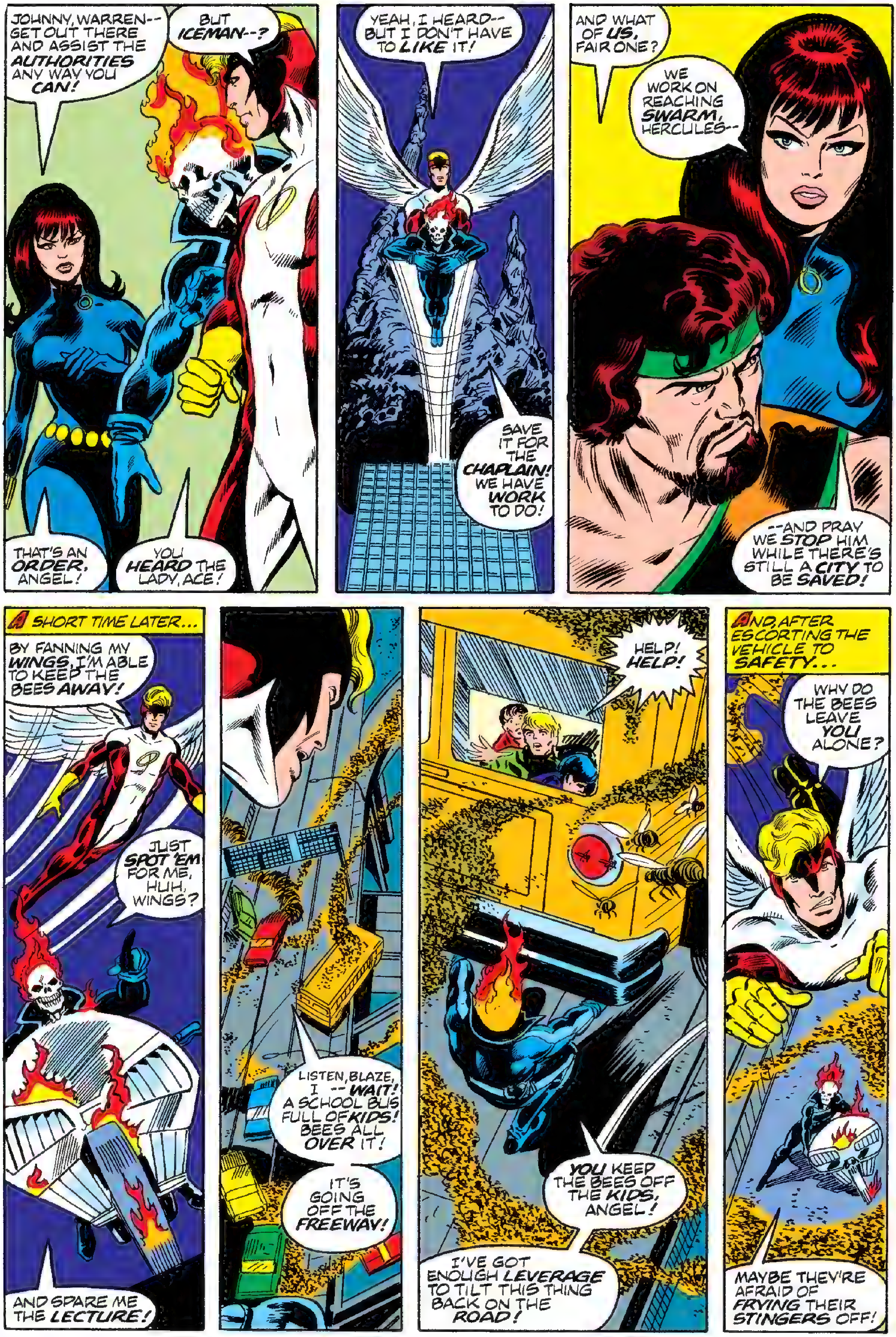

DEATH DRONE!
BEES--! SWARMING THROUGH THE BROKEN WINDOW! MILLIONS OF THEM!!
ZZZZZZZZZZZ
NO SWEAT, WIDOW! THEY CAN'T GET PAST MY ICE-SCREEN!
FEATURING THE SINISTER SAVAGERY OF SWARM LORD OF THE KILLER-BEES!

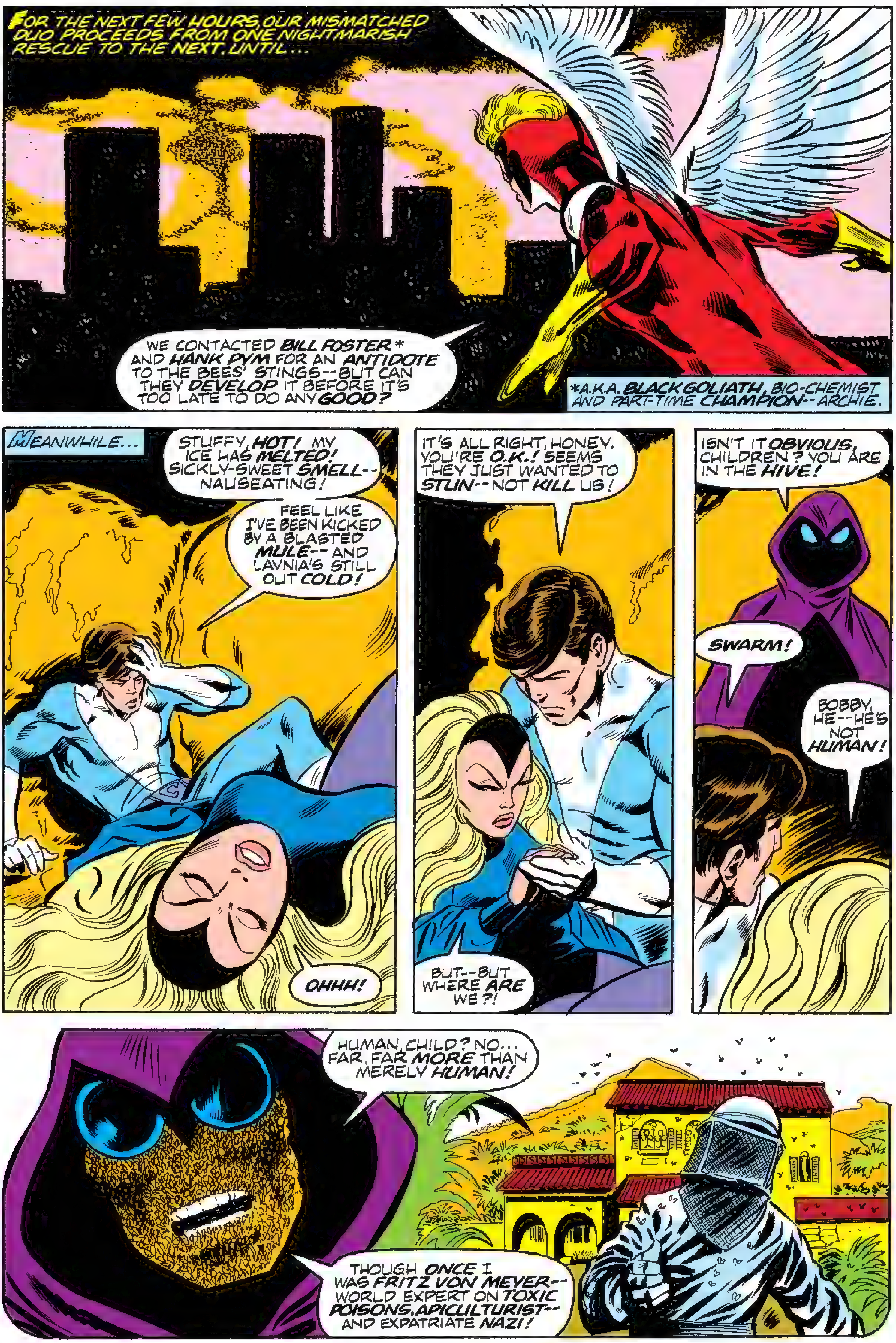

REPORTS ARE COMING IN! THE BEES HAVE COVERED ALL OF LOS ANGELES FROM SANTA MONICA BAY--
--TO HERE! I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT THEIR TARGET IS US!
EVEN AS THE ANGEL SPEAKS, A HUGE HIVE TAKES FORM ATOP THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING!
I KNOW WHY, WARREN! THEY'RE AFTER A BRIEFCASE BELONGING TO AN INTERPOL AGENT KILLED IN SANTA MONICA! *
* LAST ISH --ARCH.
A BRIEFCASE WE TRUCKED BACK HERE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S IN IT, BUT--HEY!
THE BEES!
THEY'RE COMIN' THROUGH THE AIR VENTS!
WE HAVE SEEN THAT THEIR STINGS CAN BE LETHAL!
THE DARKFORCE MUST THEN ASSURE THAT THEY DO NOT TOUCH US!
STILL THEY COME-- THROUGH WHAT THOU DOST CALL THE CENTRAL AIR-CONDITIONING DUCT!
BUT THERE BE OTHER WAYS OF STOPPING THEM!
SKRIIIT!

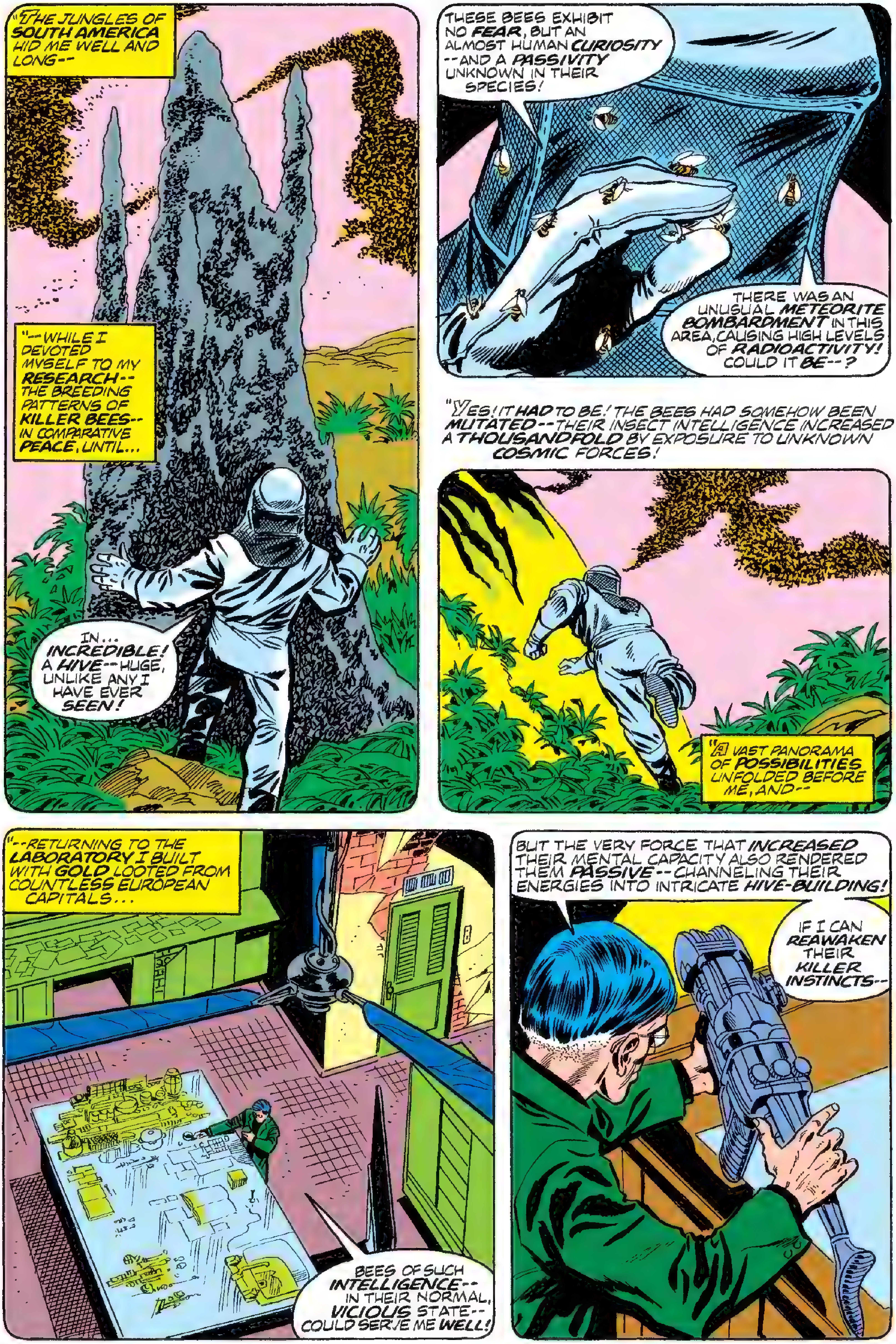

WAYS BEST KNOWN TO... HERCULES!
VASHTOOM!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO DESTROY OUR MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR, ONE-OF-A-KIND COMPUTER TO DO IT-- EVEN IF IT DID TRY TO KILL YOU!*
NOT WHEN THE ANGEL'S WINGS CAN SIMPLY BLOW THEM AWAY!
*LAST ISSUE--ARCHIE
SUDDENLY...
SKRASH!
BOBBY! YOUR ICE-SHIELD, IT'S--!
GONE, WOMAN! DESTROYED!
WEAKENED BY THE HEAT OF COUNTLESS, MINUTE, LIVING FORMS PRESSED AGAINST IT--!
--ALL DOING THE BIDDING OF... SWARM!

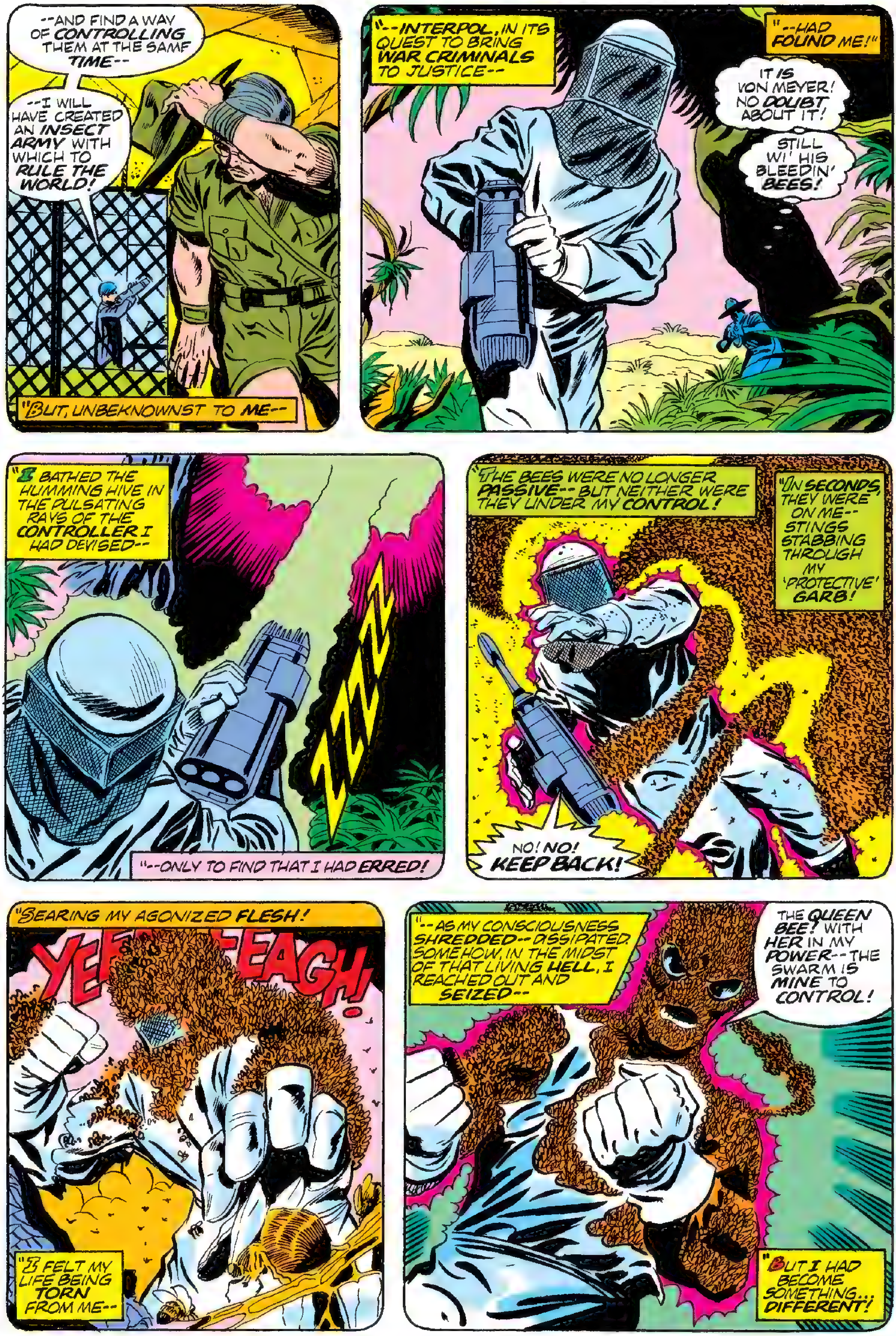

GO, MY PRETTIES! SECURE THE BRIEFCASE FOR YOUR MASTER!
BRZZZZ!
HERCULES!
FEAR NOT, MILADY!
IF THESE BE KIN TO THOSE THOU DIDST FIGHT AND DEFEAT--
--THEY WILL POSE NO THREAT TO THE SON OF ZEUS!
BUT THE GIANT MECHANICAL DRONES COME FAST AND FURIOUS--SEEMINGLY EVERYWHERE AT ONCE!
ZZZZZZ
STRIKING DOWN NON-CHAMPION--
DARKSTAR!
ZAT!
--AND CHAMPION ALIKE!
BOBBY! LAYNIA! HURT--BEING CARRIED AWAY!
ZZZZZZZZZ
ZZZZZZZZZ


NOW TO **TAKE** WHAT I HAVE **COME FOR!**
WOK!
MY GLOVE HAS BEEN **TREATED** TO NEUTRALIZE THE **REPELLANT** GUARDING THE **CASE!**
UNHH!
HE'S HEADING FOR OUR **LABS**--A **DEAD-END!**
FEAR HATH UNNERVED THE VILLAIN! HE HATH **TRAPPED** HIMSELF!
HOUNDS OF HADES!
A **HIVE WALL**--EXTENDING DOWN THROUGH THE ENTIRE **BUILDING!** HE'S SEALED US **OUT!**
MY STRONGEST BLOWS AVAIL ME **NAUGHT**-- FOR YON WALL IS INSTANTANEOUSLY **RE-FORMED** FROM THE OTHER **SIDE!**
TOOM!
WE'VE GOT TO DO **SOMETHING!** HE'S STILL GOT **BOBBY** AND **DARKSTAR!**
HOLD **UP**, WINGS! THERE'S **MORE** AT STAKE HERE THAN JUST **TWO** LIVES!
WHAT ARE YOU **TALKING** ABOUT--?!
TAKE A LOOK **OUTSIDE**, FELLA!
LOOK HE DOES, AND THE **HORROR** OF IT SEARS HIS **SOUL!**
OFF! GET THEM **OFF** OF ME!
M-MY DEAR LORD-- **HELP!**
MY... **EYES!**

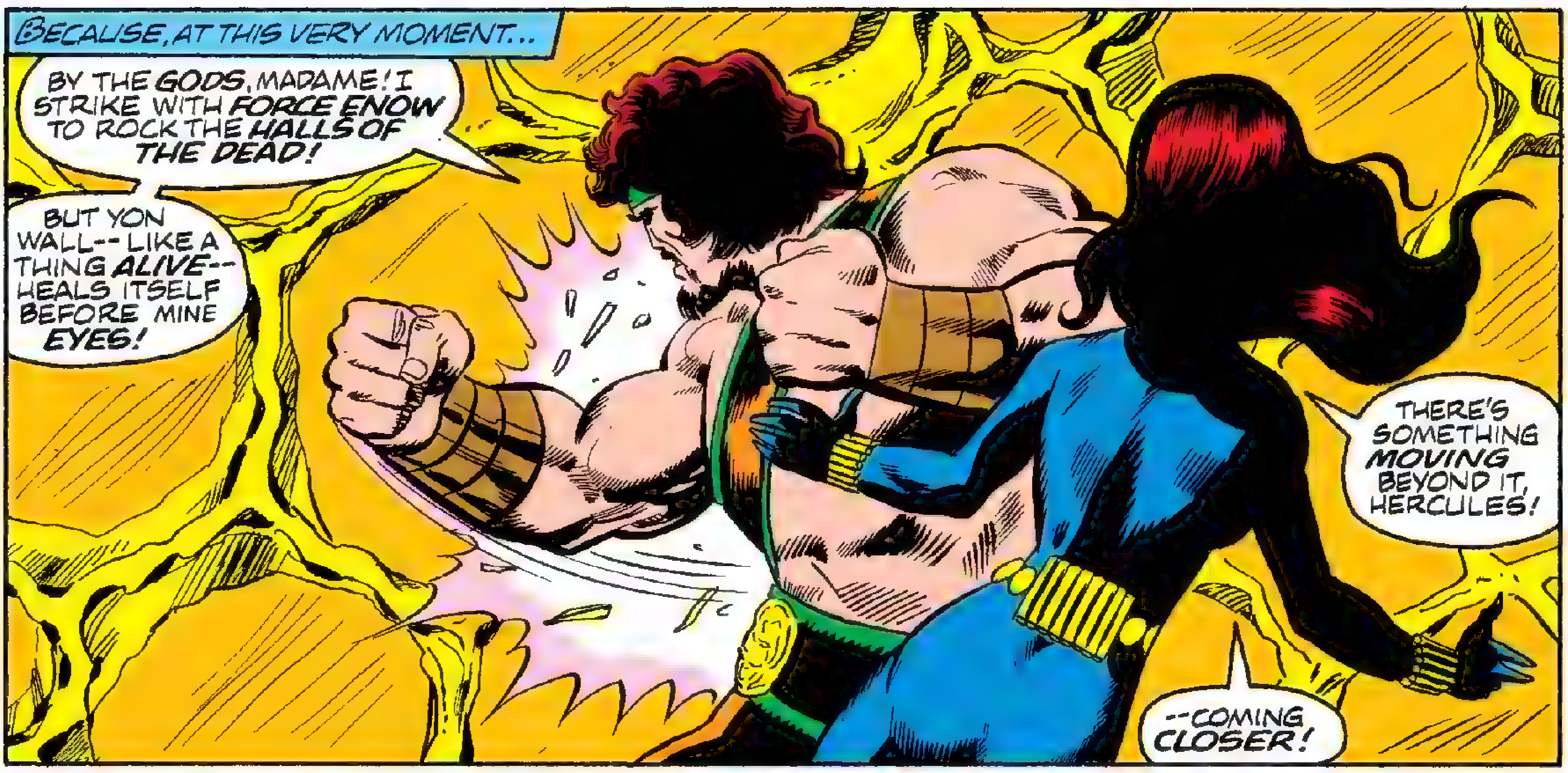

JOHNNY, WARREN-- GET OUT THERE AND ASSIST THE **AUTHORITIES** ANY WAY YOU **CAN!**
BUT **ICEMAN--?**
THAT'S AN **ORDER,** ANGEL!
YOU **HEARD** THE LADY, ACE!
YEAH, I HEARD-- BUT I DON'T HAVE TO **LIKE** IT!
SAVE IT FOR THE **CHAPLAIN!** WE HAVE **WORK** TO DO!
AND WHAT OF **US,** FAIR ONE?
WE WORK ON REACHING **SWARM,** HERCULES--
--AND PRAY WE **STOP** HIM WHILE THERE'S STILL A **CITY** TO BE **SAVED!**
A SHORT TIME LATER...
BY FANNING MY **WINGS,** I'M ABLE TO KEEP THE BEES **AWAY!**
JUST **SPOT 'EM** FOR ME, HUH, WINGS?
AND SPARE ME THE **LECTURE!**
LISTEN, BLAZE, I -- **WAIT!** A SCHOOL BUS FULL OF **KIDS!** BEES ALL **OVER** IT!
IT'S GOING OFF THE **FREEWAY!**
HELP! **HELP!**
YOU KEEP THE BEES OFF THE **KIDS,** ANGEL!
I'VE GOT ENOUGH **LEVERAGE** TO TILT THIS THING BACK ON THE **ROAD!**
AND, AFTER ESCORTING THE VEHICLE TO SAFETY...
WHY DO THE BEES LEAVE **YOU** ALONE?
MAYBE THEY'RE AFRAID OF **FRYING** THEIR **STINGERS** OFF!

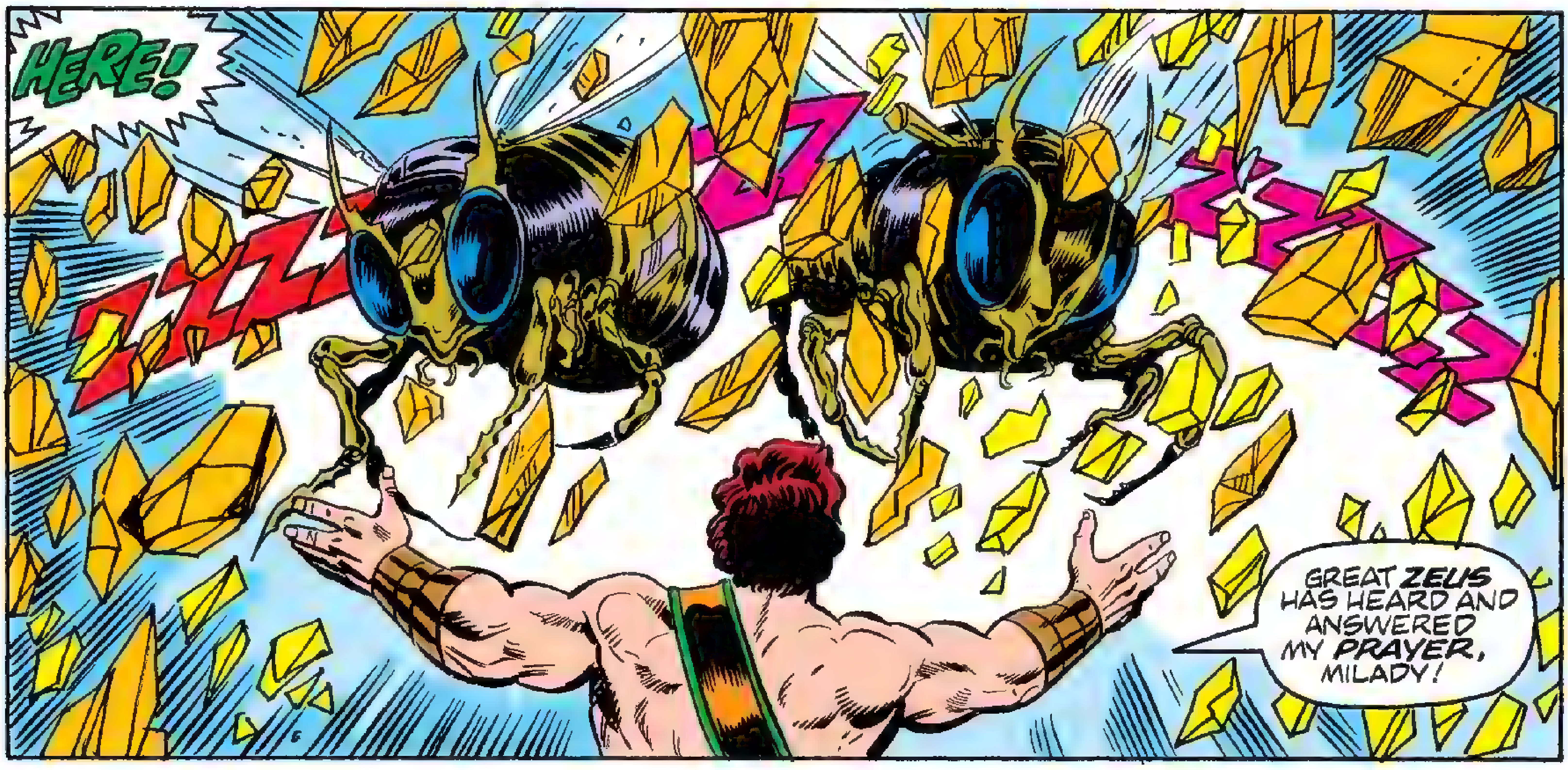

FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS, OUR MISMATCHED DUO PROCEEDS FROM ONE NIGHTMARISH RESCUE TO THE NEXT, UNTIL...
WE CONTACTED BILL FOSTER* AND HANK PYM FOR AN ANTIDOTE TO THE BEES' STINGS--BUT CAN THEY DEVELOP IT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE TO DO ANY GOOD?
*A.K.A. BLACK GOLIATH, BIO-CHEMIST AND PART-TIME CHAMPION--ARCHIE.
MEANWHILE...
STUFFY, HOT! MY ICE HAS MELTED! SICKLY-SWEET SMELL-- NAUSEATING!
FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN KICKED BY A BLASTED MULE-- AND LAVNIA'S STILL OUT COLD!
OHHH!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, HONEY. YOU'RE O.K.! SEEMS THEY JUST WANTED TO STUN-- NOT KILL US!
BUT--BUT WHERE ARE WE?!
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS, CHILDREN? YOU ARE IN THE HIVE!
SWARM!
BOBBY, HE--HE'S NOT HUMAN!
HUMAN, CHILD? NO... FAR, FAR MORE THAN MERELY HUMAN!
THOUGH ONCE I WAS FRITZ VON MEYER-- WORLD EXPERT ON TOXIC POISONS, APICULTURIST-- AND EXPATRIATE NAZI!

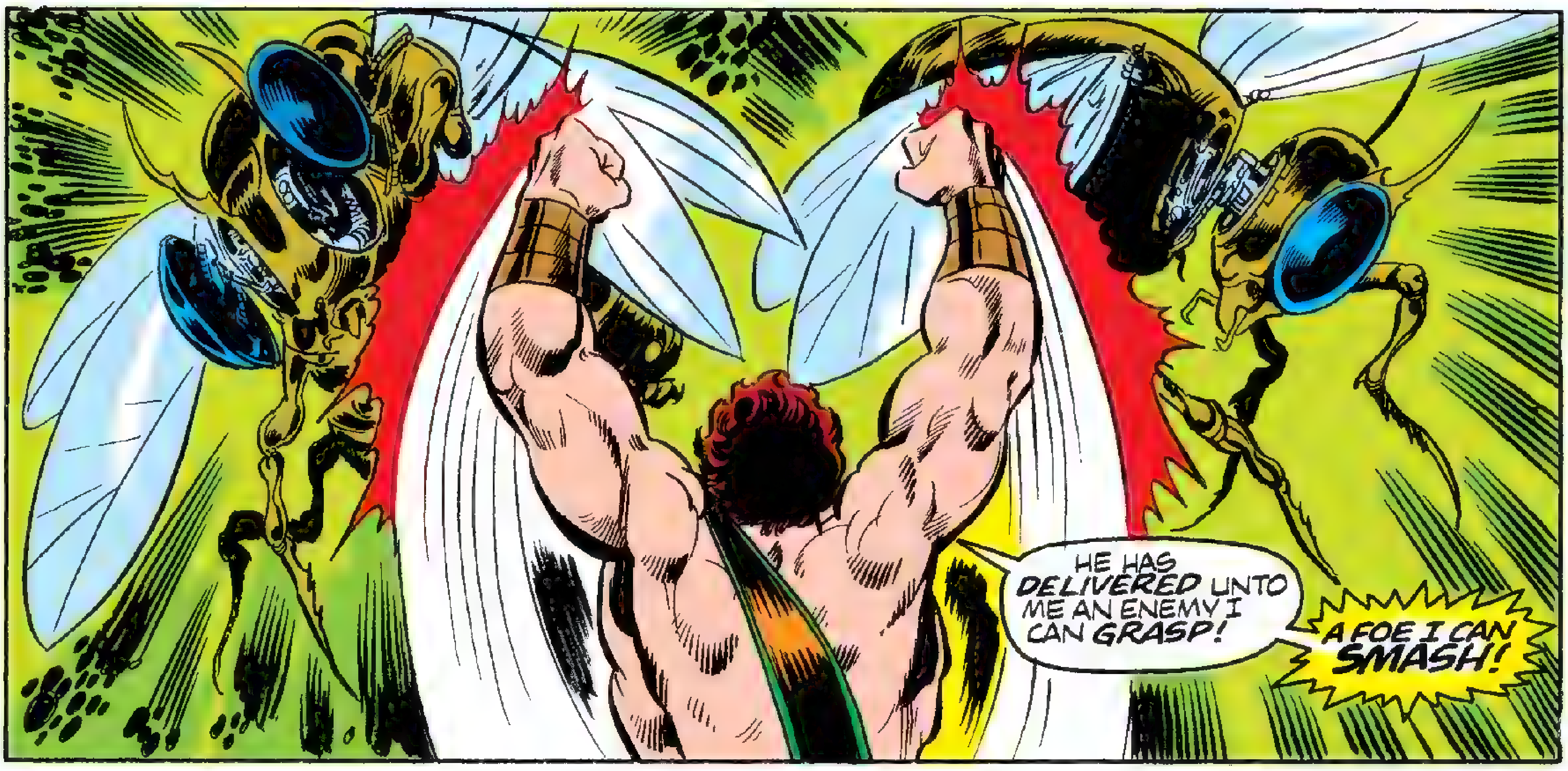

"THE JUNGLES OF SOUTH AMERICA HID ME WELL AND LONG--
"--WHILE I DEVOTED MYSELF TO MY RESEARCH--THE BREEDING PATTERNS OF KILLER BEES--IN COMPARATIVE PEACE, UNTIL...
IN... INCREDIBLE! A HIVE--HUGE, UNLIKE ANY I HAVE EVER SEEN!
THESE BEES EXHIBIT NO FEAR, BUT AN ALMOST HUMAN CURIOSITY--AND A PASSIVITY UNKNOWN IN THEIR SPECIES!
THERE WAS AN UNUSUAL METEORITE BOMBARDMENT IN THIS AREA, CAUSING HIGH LEVELS OF RADIOACTIVITY! COULD IT BE--?
"YES! IT HAD TO BE! THE BEES HAD SOMEHOW BEEN MUTATED--THEIR INSECT INTELLIGENCE INCREASED A THOUSANDFOLD BY EXPOSURE TO UNKNOWN COSMIC FORCES!
"A VAST PANORAMA OF POSSIBILITIES UNFOLDED BEFORE ME, AND--
"--RETURNING TO THE LABORATORY I BUILT WITH GOLD LOOTED FROM COUNTLESS EUROPEAN CAPITALS...
BEES OF SUCH INTELLIGENCE--IN THEIR NORMAL, VICIOUS STATE--COULD SERVE ME WELL!
BUT THE VERY FORCE THAT INCREASED THEIR MENTAL CAPACITY ALSO RENDERED THEM PASSIVE--CHANNELING THEIR ENERGIES INTO INTRICATE HIVE-BUILDING!
IF I CAN REAWAKEN THEIR KILLER INSTINCTS--

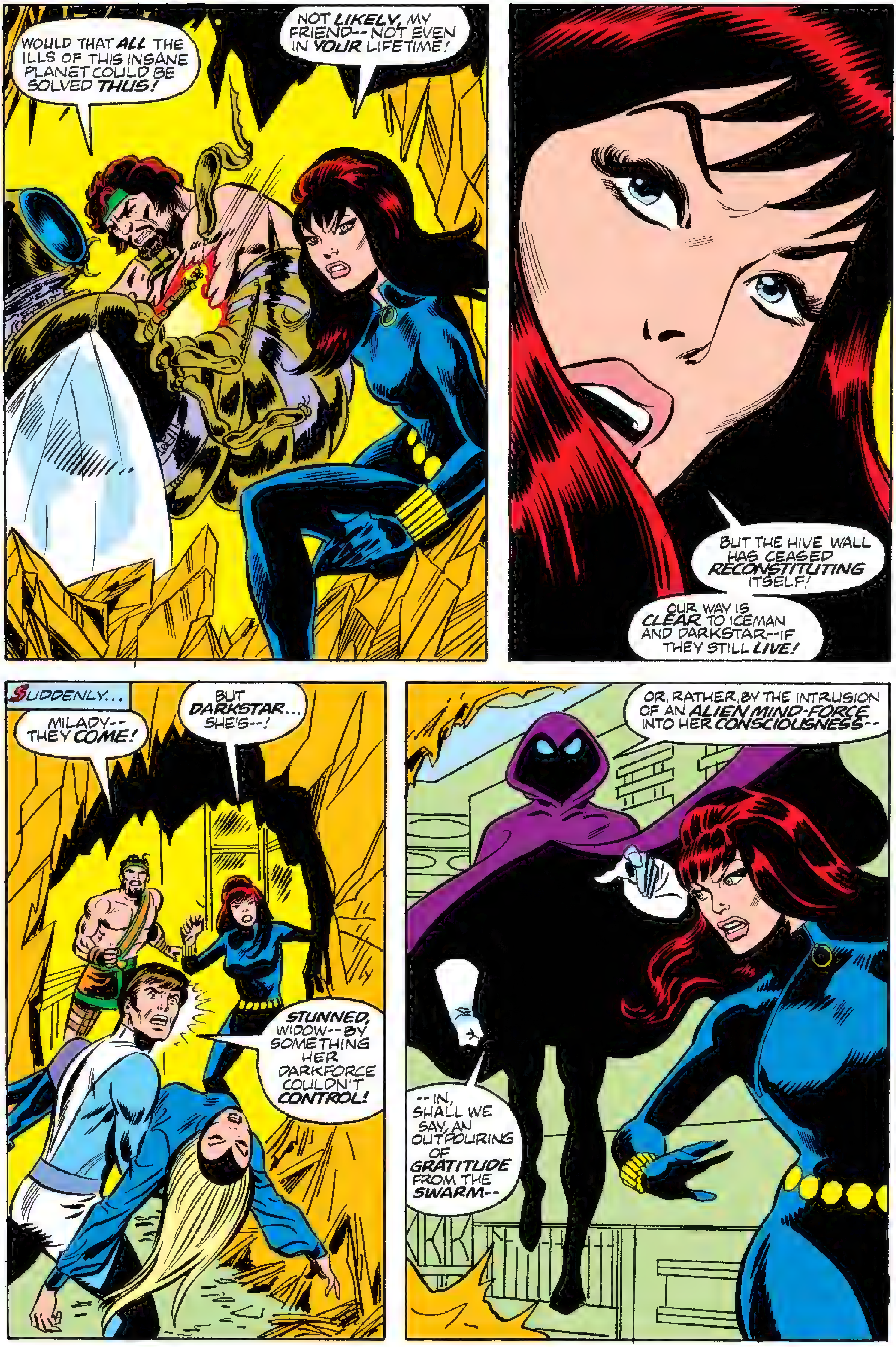

--AND FIND A WAY OF CONTROLLING THEM AT THE SAME TIME--
--I WILL HAVE CREATED AN INSECT ARMY WITH WHICH TO RULE THE WORLD!
"BUT, UNBEKNOWNST TO ME--
"--INTERPOL, IN ITS QUEST TO BRING WAR CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE--
"--HAD FOUND ME!"
IT IS VON MEYER! NO DOUBT ABOUT IT!
STILL WI' HIS BLEEDIN' BEES!
"I BATHED THE HUMMING HIVE IN THE PULSATING RAYS OF THE CONTROLLER I HAD DEVISED--
"--ONLY TO FIND THAT I HAD ERRED!
"THE BEES WERE NO LONGER PASSIVE-- BUT NEITHER WERE THEY UNDER MY CONTROL!
"IN SECONDS, THEY WERE ON ME-- STINGS STABBING THROUGH MY 'PROTECTIVE' GARB!
NO! NO! KEEP BACK!
"SEARING MY AGONIZED FLESH!
YE EAGH!
"I FELT MY LIFE BEING TORN FROM ME--
"--AS MY CONSCIOUSNESS SHREDDED-- DISSIPATED. SOMEHOW, IN THE MIDST OF THAT LIVING HELL, I REACHED OUT AND SEIZED--
THE QUEEN BEE! WITH HER IN MY POWER--THE SWARM IS MINE TO CONTROL!
"BUT I HAD BECOME SOMETHING... DIFFERENT!

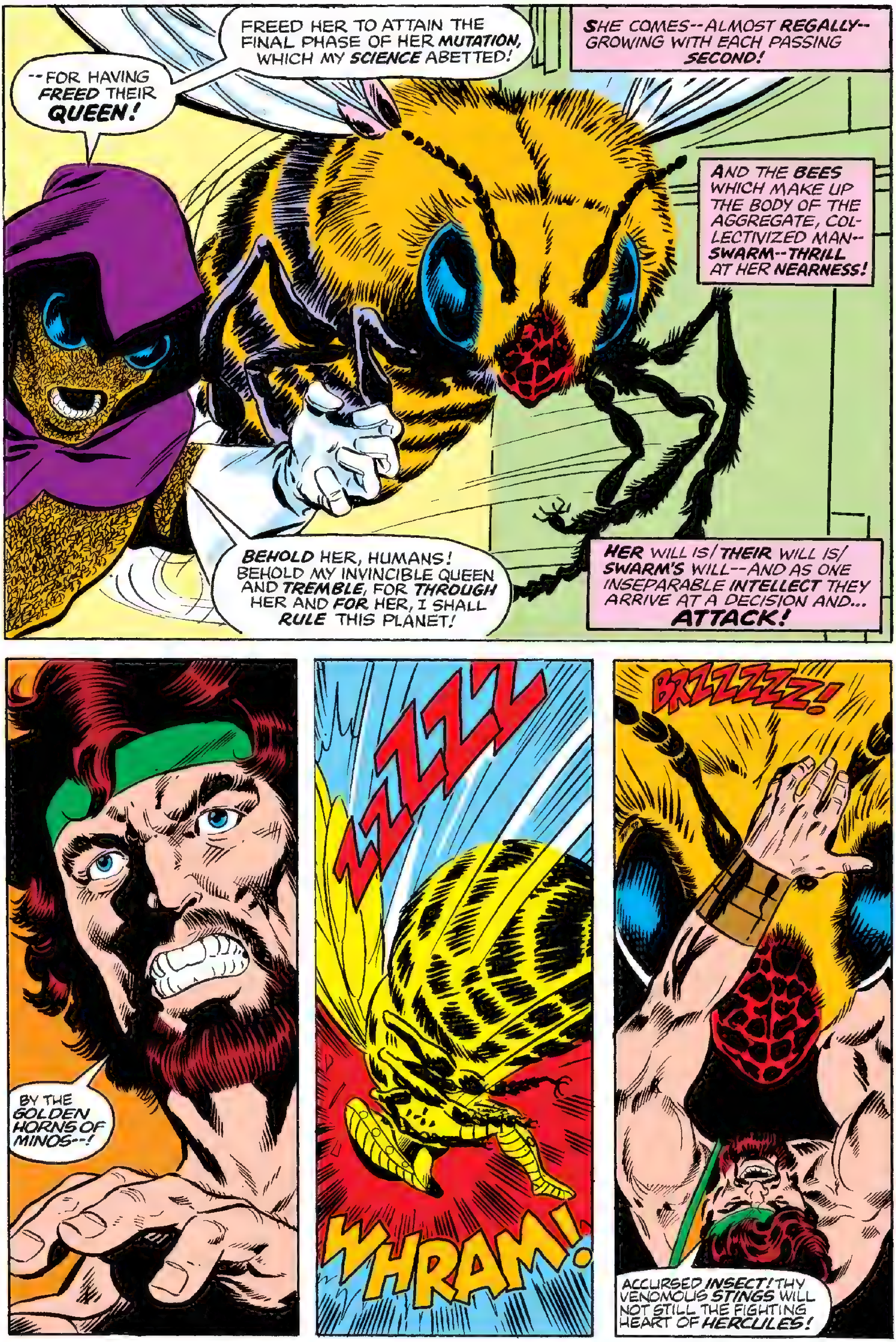
AN AGGREGATE MAN-- A LIVING EMBODIMENT OF THE SWARM-- MY OWN SCIENTIFIC MIND ADDED TO THE MUTANT INTELLIGENCE OF THE MULTITUDE! OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS GROWN QUITE--
--SYMBIOTIC! THROUGH ME, THEY CREATE--THEY THINK! THROUGH THEM, I LIVE... AND CONQUER!
BUT SOMETHIN' WENT WRONG, HUH?
YES! THE ACCURSED INTERPOL AGENT STOLE OUR QUEEN! ENCASED HER-- ALIVE-- IN AMBER!
AND YOU HAD TO GET HER BACK TO KEEP YOUR BUZZING BUDDIES ON YOUR SIDE!
SO YOU GOT HER-- BUT HOW DO WE FIT IN?
HE... HAD BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A WAY OF SHATTERING THE AMBER WITHOUT HARMING THE QUEEN!
UNTIL HE SAW OUR POWERS IN ACTION! WELL, FORGET IT!
NO, BOBBY! WE WILL NOT "FORGET IT!"
WWWHAT?!!
YOU MEAN YOU'D HELP THIS CREEP?!
SWARM? NO! NOT SWARM! BUT HER! SHE IS TRAPPED, BOBBY!
YOU... CAN'T KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE... APART! BUT I-- I CAN!
MIND TO MIND SHE CRIES OUT TO ME-- TO THE DARKFORCE!
AND WE SHALL BE FREE!
THE HIVE WALL AND THE AMBER-- SHATTERED!
ZSTRAK!
BUT THE QUEEN! IS SHE--?
LATER FOR THAT, SWARM!

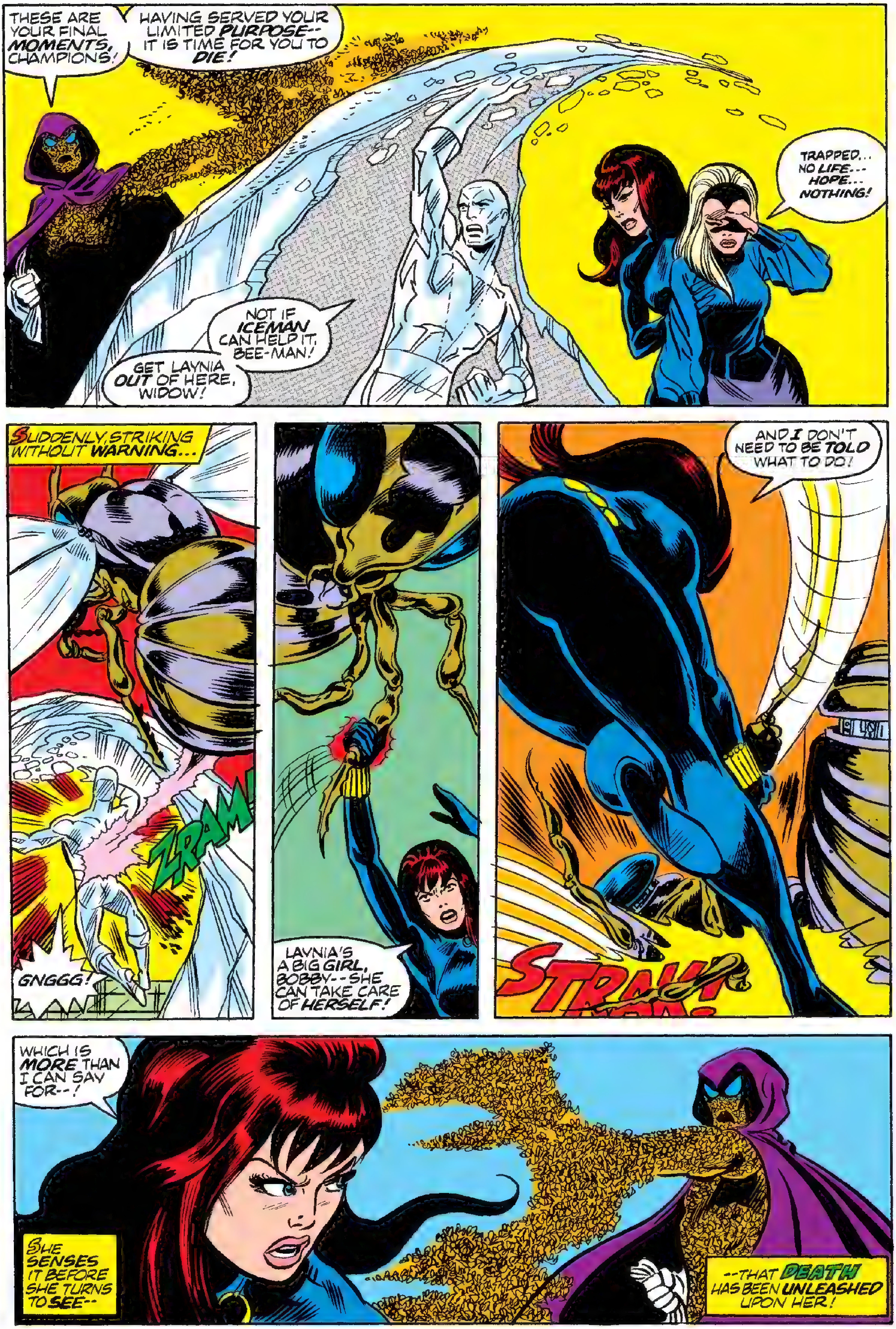

BECAUSE, AT THIS VERY MOMENT...
BY THE GODS, MADAME! I STRIKE WITH FORCE ENOW TO ROCK THE HALLS OF THE DEAD!
BUT YON WALL-- LIKE A THING ALIVE-- HEALS ITSELF BEFORE MINE EYES!
THERE'S SOMETHING MOVING BEYOND IT, HERCULES!
--COMING CLOSER!

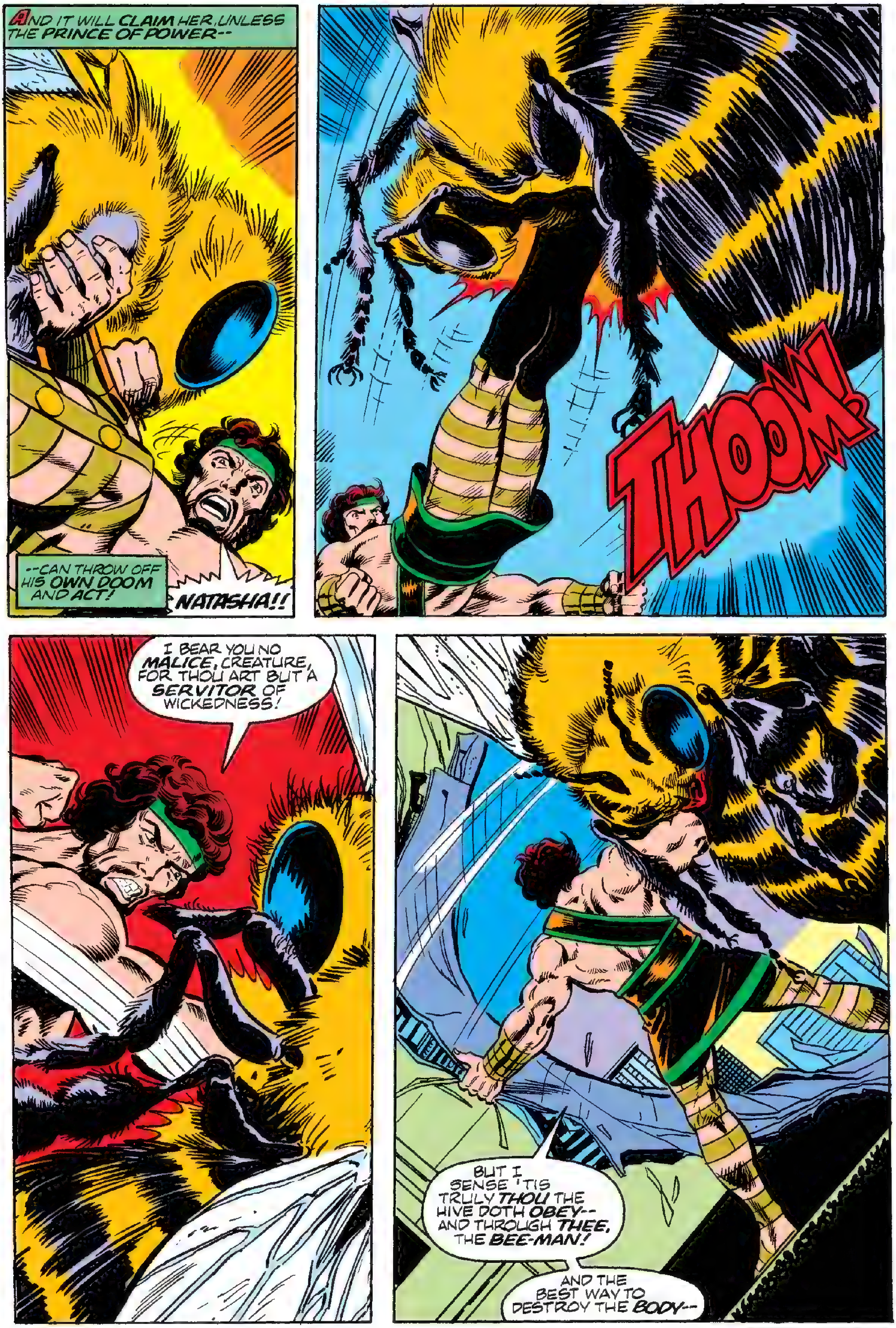

HERE!
GREAT ZEUS HAS HEARD AND ANSWERED MY PRAYER, MILADY!

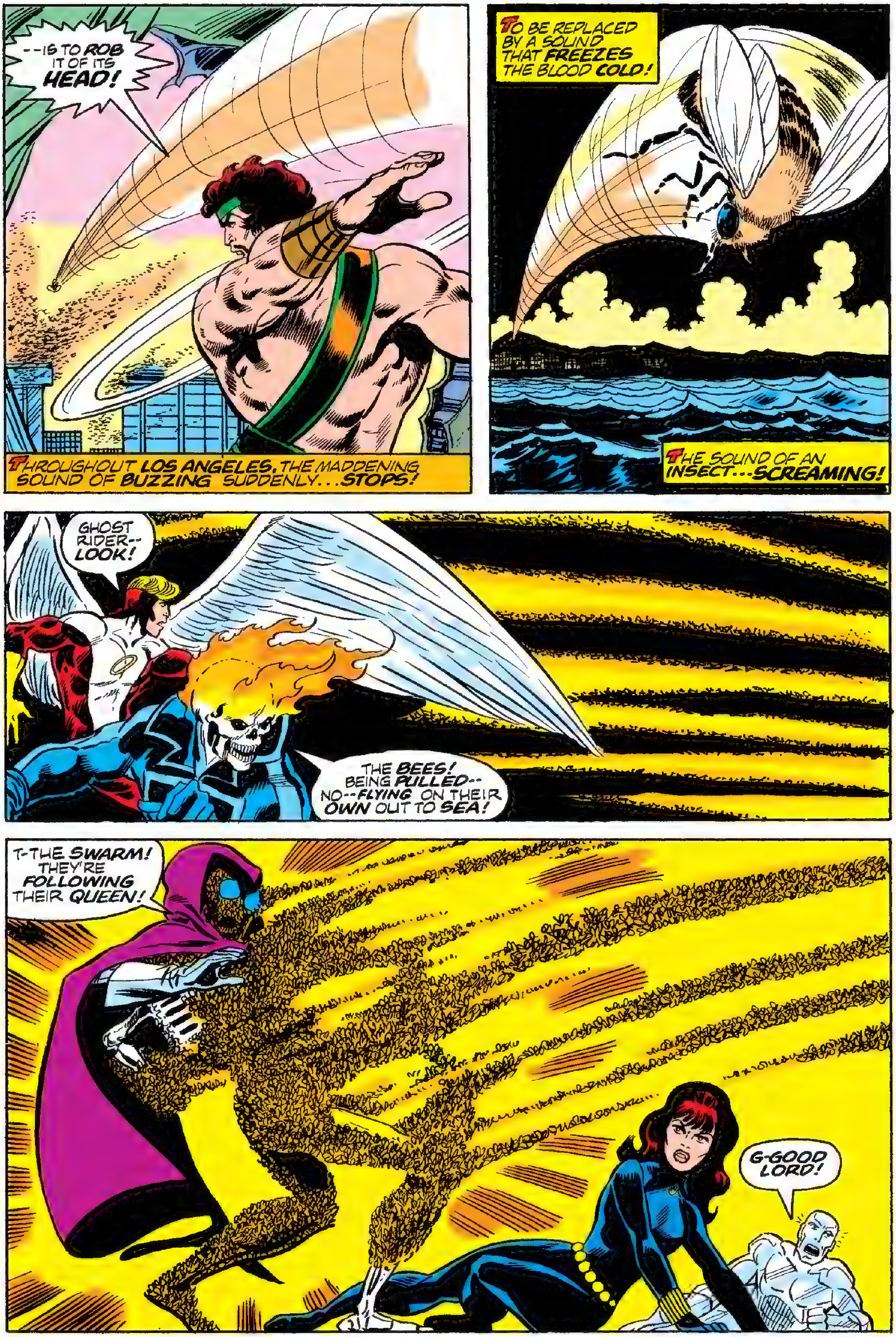

HE HAS DELIVERED UNTO ME AN ENEMY I CAN GRASP!
A FOE I CAN SMASH!

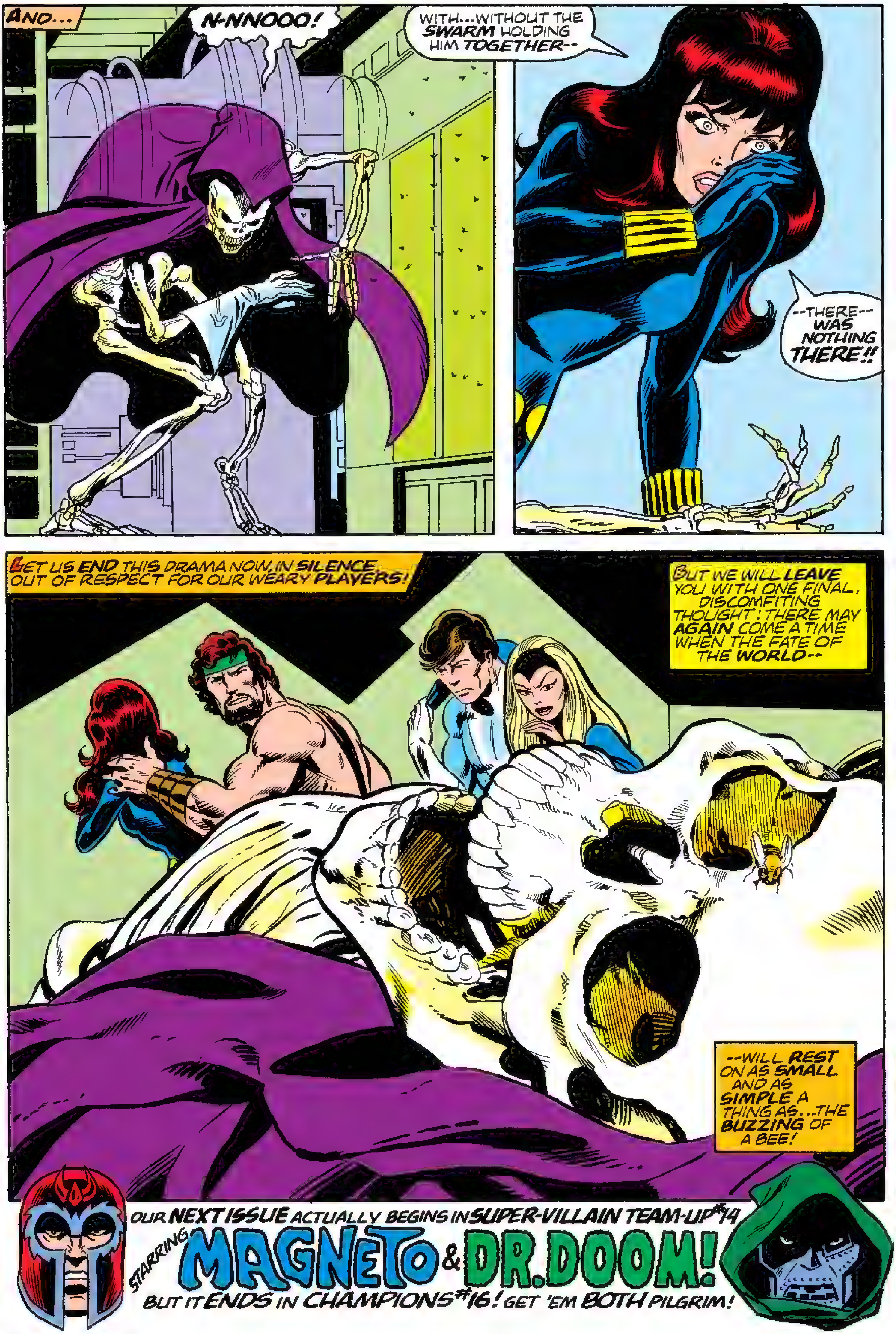

WOULD THAT ALL THE ILLS OF THIS INSANE PLANET COULD BE SOLVED THUS!
NOT LIKELY, MY FRIEND-- NOT EVEN IN YOUR LIFETIME!
BUT THE HIVE WALL HAS CEASED RECONSTITUTING ITSELF!
OUR WAY IS CLEAR TO ICEMAN AND DARKSTAR--IF THEY STILL LIVE!
SUDDENLY...
MILADY-- THEY COME!
BUT DARKSTAR... SHE'S--!
STUNNED, WIDOW--BY SOMETHING HER DARKFORCE COULDN'T CONTROL!
OR, RATHER, BY THE INTRUSION OF AN ALIEN MIND-FORCE INTO HER CONSCIOUSNESS--
--IN, SHALL WE SAY, AN OUTPOURING OF GRATITUDE FROM THE SWARM--


--FOR HAVING FREED THEIR QUEEN!
FREED HER TO ATTAIN THE FINAL PHASE OF HER MUTATION, WHICH MY SCIENCE ABETTED!
SHE COMES--ALMOST REGALLY--GROWING WITH EACH PASSING SECOND!
AND THE BEES WHICH MAKE UP THE BODY OF THE AGGREGATE, COLLECTIVIZED MAN--SWARM--THRILL AT HER NEARNESS!
BEHOLD HER, HUMANS! BEHOLD MY INVINCIBLE QUEEN AND TREMBLE, FOR THROUGH HER AND FOR HER, I SHALL RULE THIS PLANET!
HER WILL IS/ THEIR WILL IS/ SWARM'S WILL--AND AS ONE INSEPARABLE INTELLECT THEY ARRIVE AT A DECISION AND... ATTACK!
BY THE GOLDEN HORNS OF MINOS--!
ZZZZZ
WHRAM!
BRZZZZZ!
ACCURSED INSECT! THY VENOMOUS STINGS WILL NOT STILL THE FIGHTING HEART OF HERCULES!


THESE ARE YOUR FINAL **MOMENTS**, CHAMPIONS!
HAVING SERVED YOUR LIMITED **PURPOSE**-- IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO **DIE!**
TRAPPED... NO **LIFE**... **HOPE**... **NOTHING!**
NOT IF **ICEMAN** CAN HELP IT, BEE-MAN!
GET LAYNIA **OUT** OF HERE, WIDOW!
SUDDENLY STRIKING WITHOUT **WARNING**...
ZRAM!
GNGGG!
LAYNIA'S A BIG **GIRL**, BOBBY--SHE CAN TAKE CARE OF **HERSELF!**
AND **I** DON'T NEED TO BE **TOLD** WHAT TO DO!
STRAK!
WHICH IS **MORE** THAN I CAN SAY FOR--!
SHE **SENSES** IT BEFORE SHE TURNS TO **SEE**--
--THAT **DEATH** HAS BEEN **UNLEASHED** UPON HER!


AND IT WILL CLAIM HER, UNLESS THE PRINCE OF POWER--
--CAN THROW OFF HIS OWN DOOM AND ACT!
NATASHA!!
THOOM!
I BEAR YOU NO MALICE, CREATURE, FOR THOU ART BUT A SERVITOR OF WICKEDNESS!
BUT I SENSE 'TIS TRULY THOU THE HIVE DOTH OBEY-- AND THROUGH THEE, THE BEE-MAN!
AND THE BEST WAY TO DESTROY THE BODY--


--IS TO ROB IT OF ITS HEAD!
THROUGHOUT LOS ANGELES, THE MADDENING SOUND OF BUZZING SUDDENLY...STOPS!
TO BE REPLACED BY A SOUND THAT FREEZES THE BLOOD COLD!
THE SOUND OF AN INSECT...SCREAMING!
GHOST RIDER--LOOK!
THE BEES! BEING PULLED--NO--FLYING ON THEIR OWN OUT TO SEA!
T-THE SWARM! THEY'RE FOLLOWING THEIR QUEEN!
G-GOOD LORD!


AND...
N-NNOOO!
WITH...WITHOUT THE SWARM HOLDING HIM TOGETHER--
--THERE-- WAS NOTHING THERE!!
LET US END THIS DRAMA NOW, IN SILENCE, OUT OF RESPECT FOR OUR WEARY PLAYERS!
BUT WE WILL LEAVE YOU WITH ONE FINAL, DISCOMFITING THOUGHT: THERE MAY AGAIN COME A TIME WHEN THE FATE OF THE WORLD--
--WILL REST ON AS SMALL AND AS SIMPLE A THING AS...THE BUZZING OF A BEE!
OUR NEXT ISSUE ACTUALLY BEGINS IN SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #14
STARRING MAGNETO & DR. DOOM!
BUT IT ENDS IN CHAMPIONS #16! GET 'EM BOTH PILGRIM!

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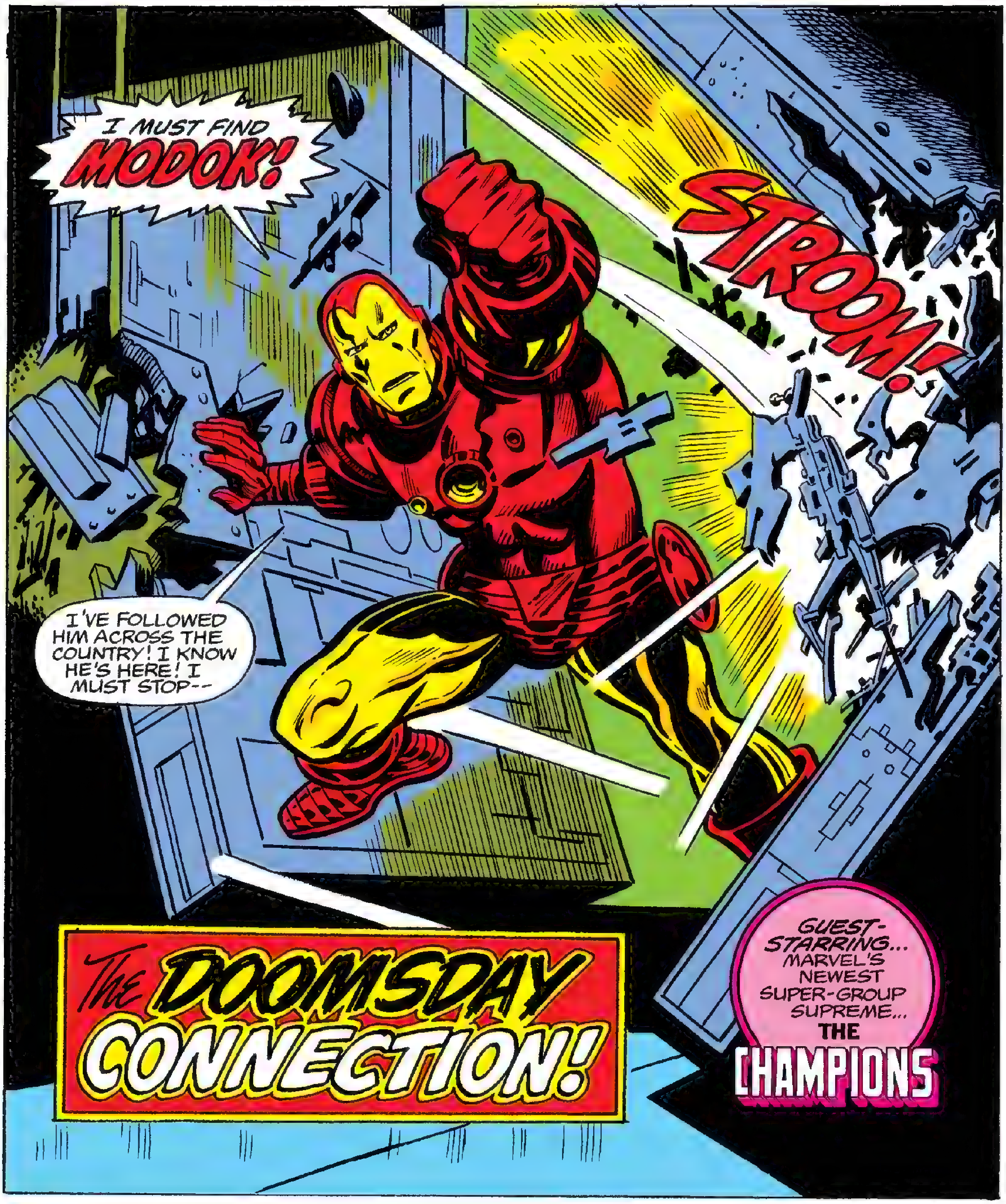
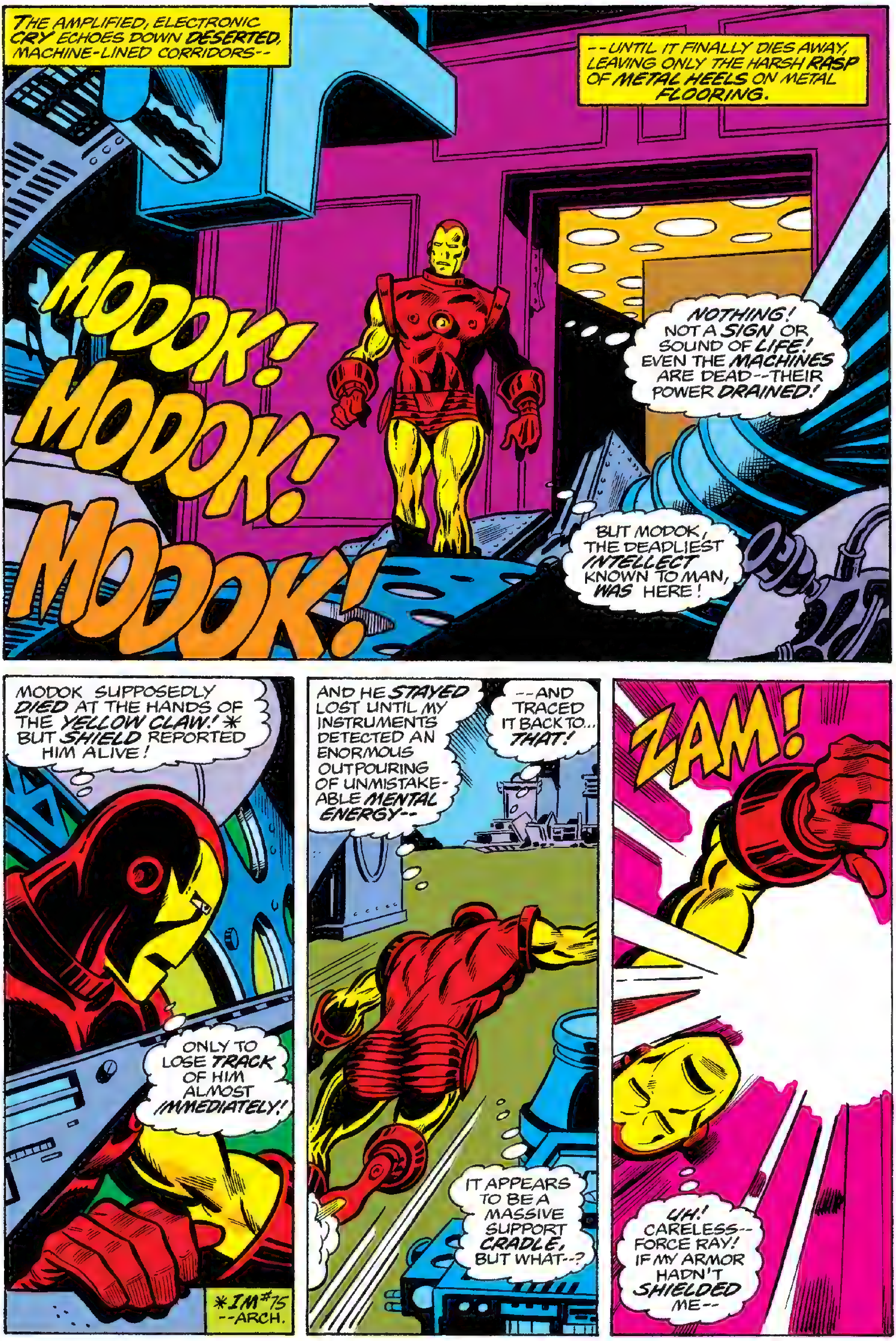
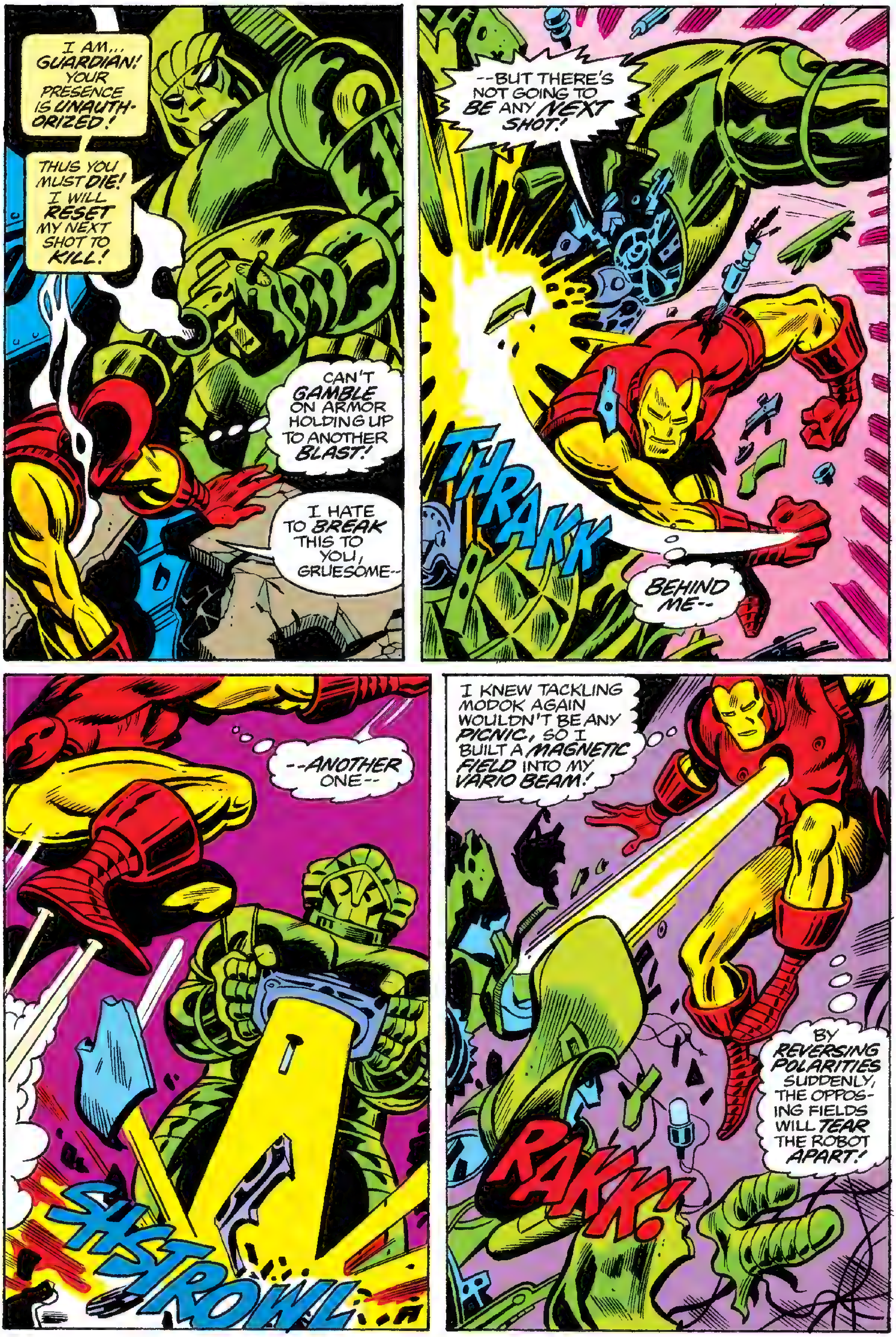
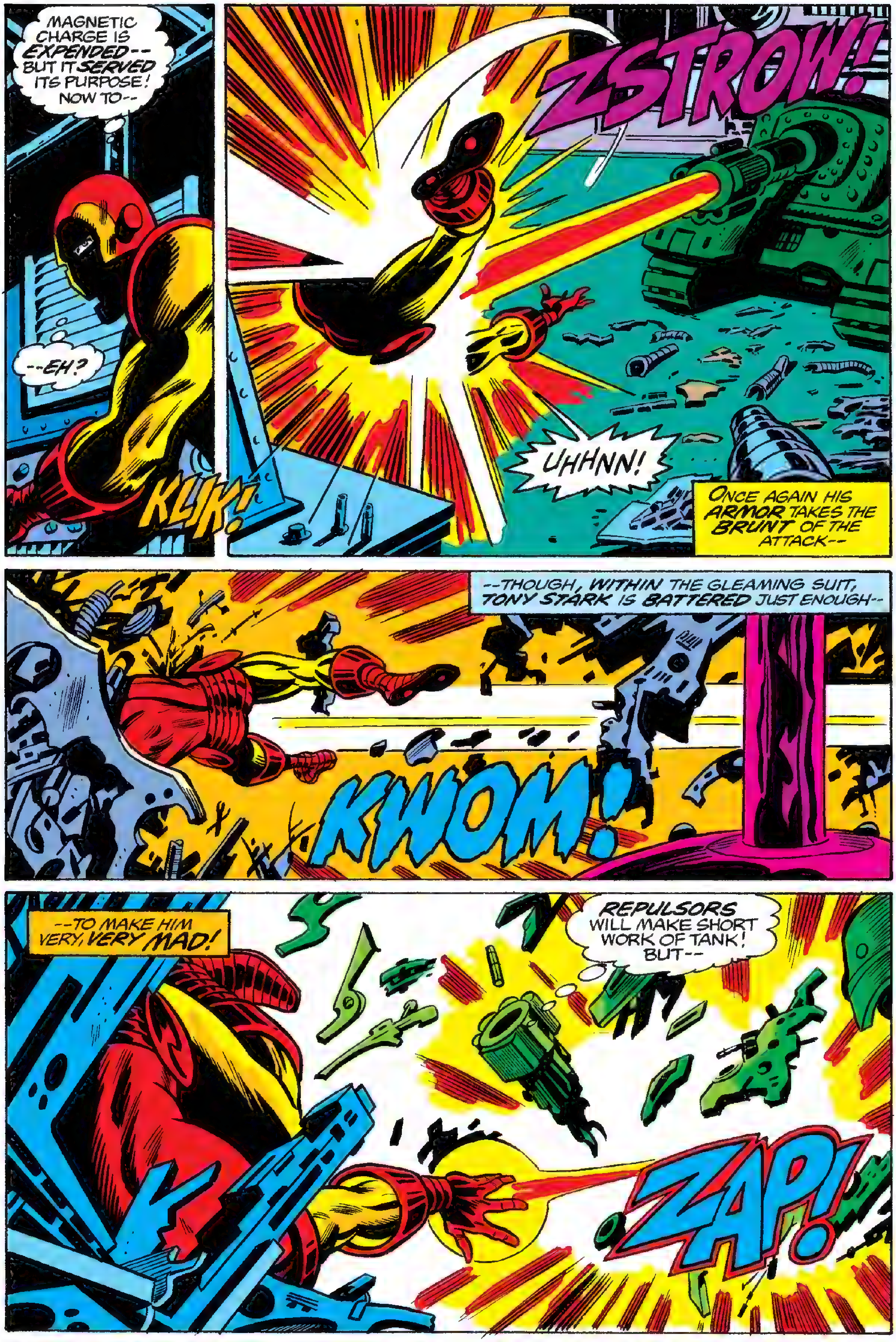
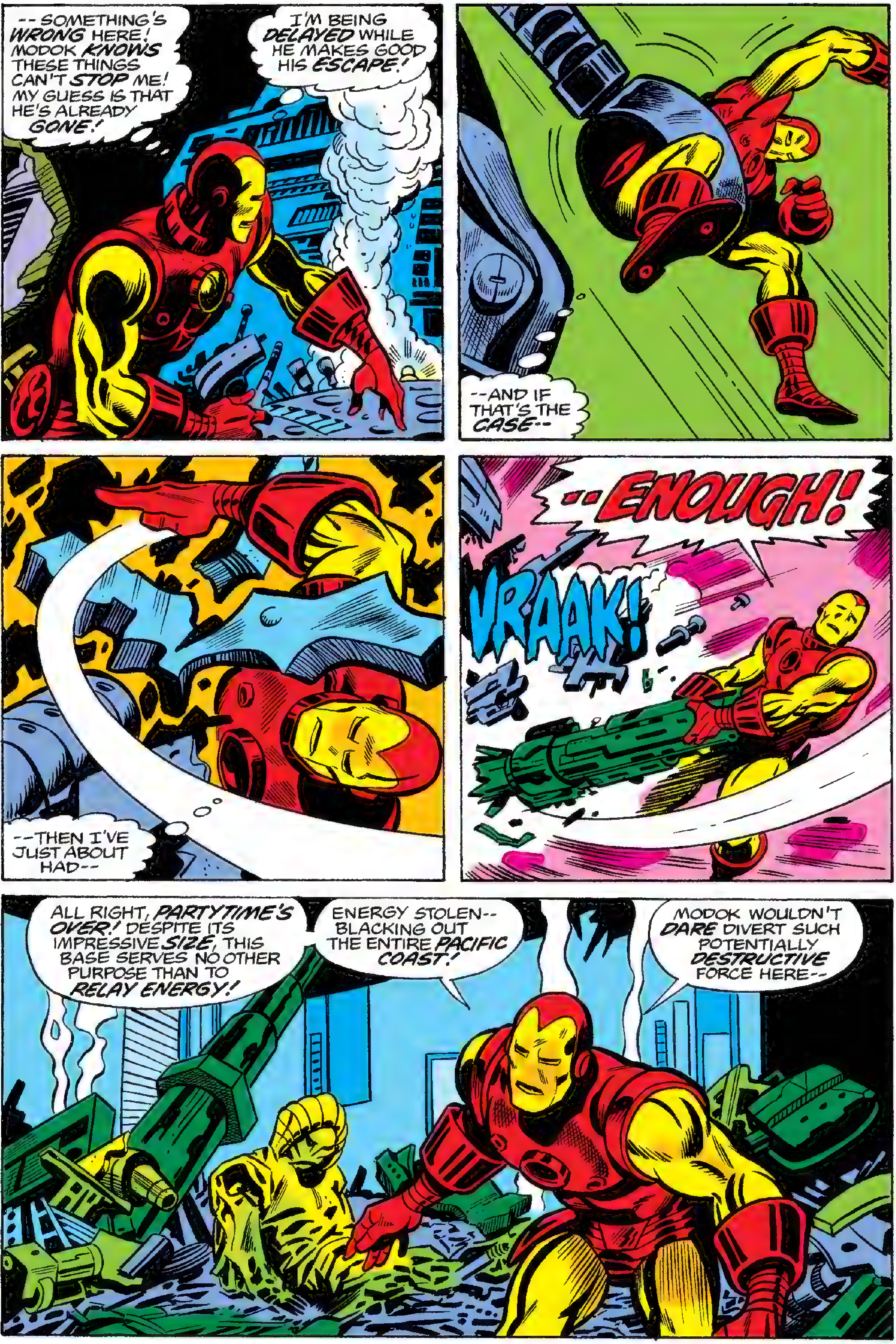
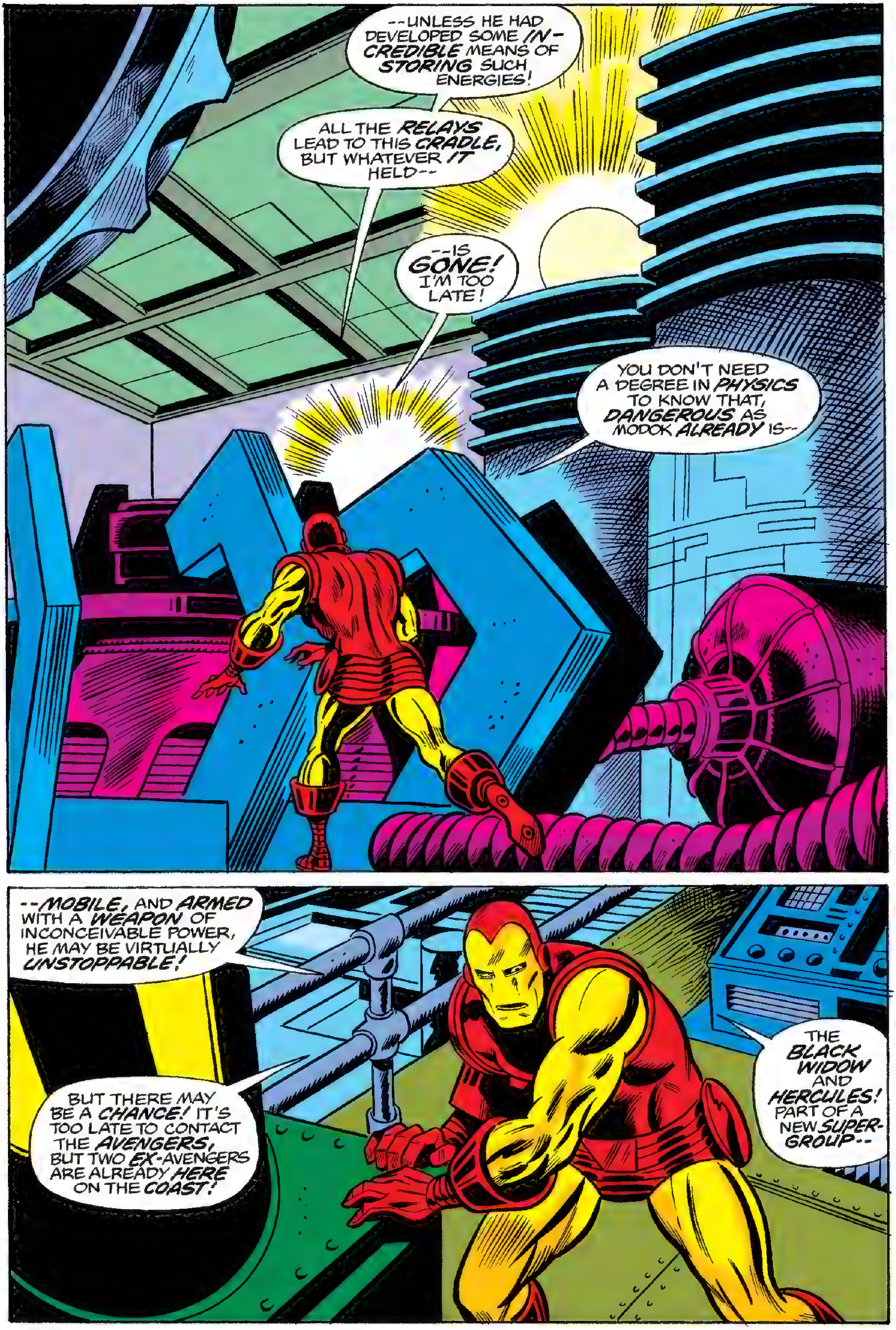

I MUST FIND MODOK!
STROOM!
I'VE FOLLOWED HIM ACROSS THE COUNTRY! I KNOW HE'S HERE! I MUST STOP--
The DOOMSDAY CONNECTION!
GUEST-STARRING... MARVEL'S NEWEST SUPER-GROUP SUPREME... THE CHAMPIONS

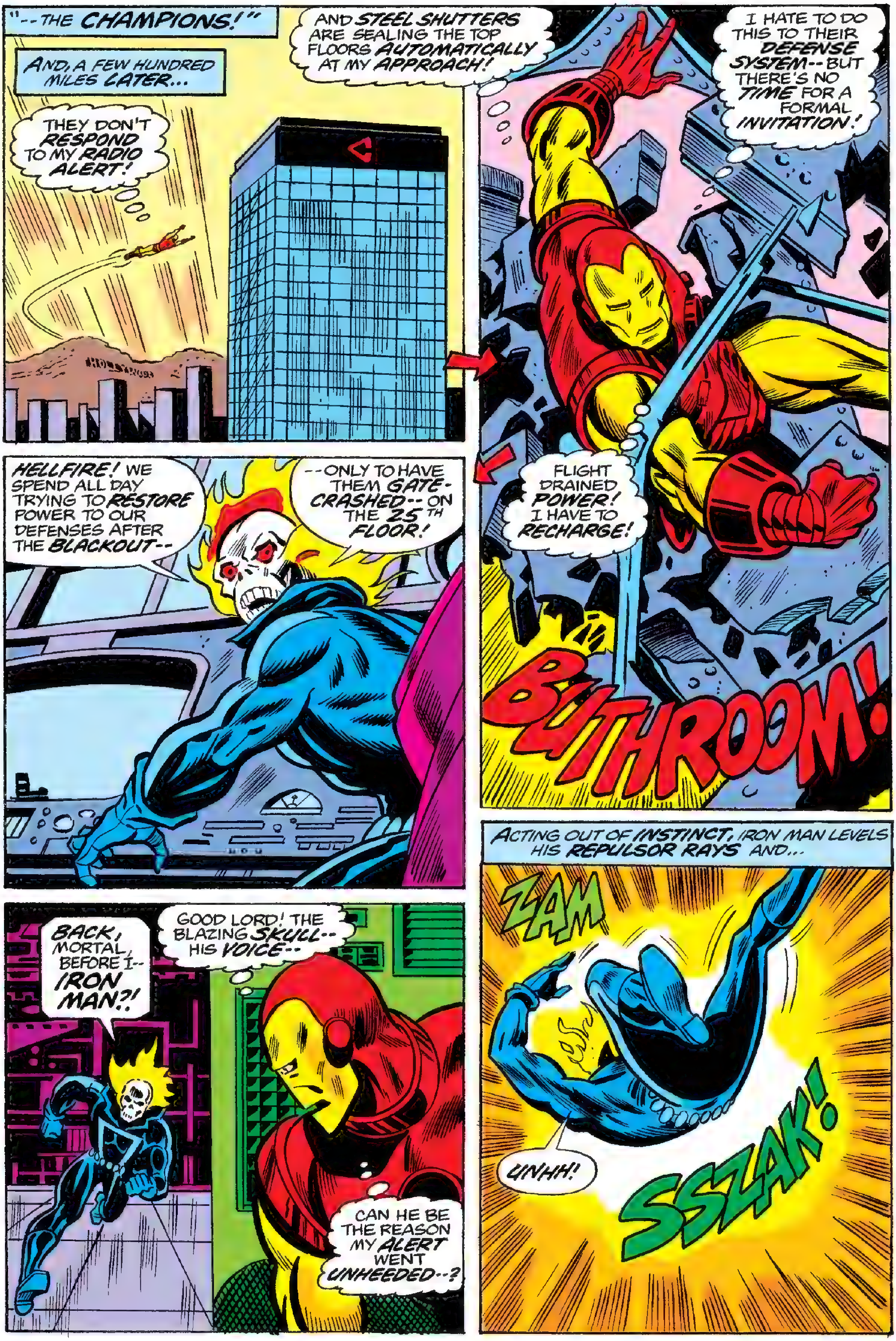

THE AMPLIFIED, ELECTRONIC CRY ECHOES DOWN DESERTED, MACHINE-LINED CORRIDORS--
--UNTIL IT FINALLY DIES AWAY, LEAVING ONLY THE HARSH RASP OF METAL HEELS ON METAL FLOORING.
MODOK! MODOK! MODOK!
NOTHING! NOT A SIGN OR SOUND OF LIFE! EVEN THE MACHINES ARE DEAD--THEIR POWER DRAINED!
BUT MODOK, THE DEADLIEST INTELLECT KNOWN TO MAN, WAS HERE!
MODOK SUPPOSEDLY DIED AT THE HANDS OF THE YELLOW CLAW! * BUT SHIELD REPORTED HIM ALIVE!
ONLY TO LOSE TRACK OF HIM ALMOST IMMEDIATELY!
*IM #75 --ARCH.
AND HE STAYED LOST UNTIL MY INSTRUMENTS DETECTED AN ENORMOUS OUTPOURING OF UNMISTAKE-ABLE MENTAL ENERGY--
--AND TRACED IT BACK TO... THAT!
IT APPEARS TO BE A MASSIVE SUPPORT CRADLE, BUT WHAT--?
ZAM!
UH! CARELESS--FORCE RAY! IF MY ARMOR HADN'T SHIELDED ME--

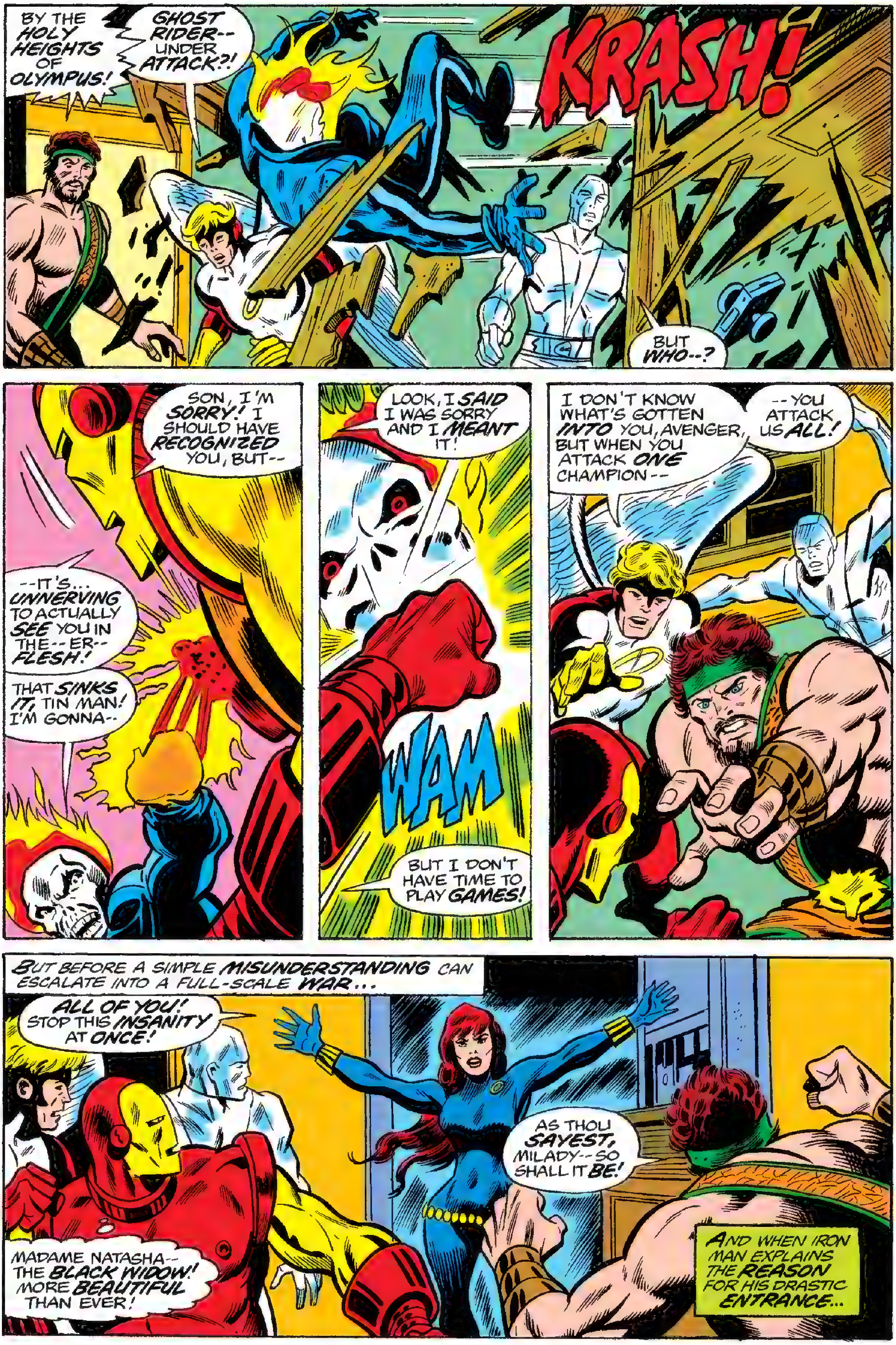

I AM... GUARDIAN! YOUR PRESENCE IS UNAUTHORIZED!
THUS YOU MUST DIE! I WILL RESET MY NEXT SHOT TO KILL!
CAN'T GAMBLE ON ARMOR HOLDING UP TO ANOTHER BLAST!
I HATE TO BREAK THIS TO YOU, GRUESOME--
--BUT THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE ANY NEXT SHOT!
THRAKK
BEHIND ME--
--ANOTHER ONE--
SHSTROWL
I KNEW TACKLING MODOK AGAIN WOULDN'T BE ANY PICNIC, SO I BUILT A MAGNETIC FIELD INTO MY VARIO BEAM!
BY REVERSING POLARITIES SUDDENLY, THE OPPOSING FIELDS WILL TEAR THE ROBOT APART!
RAKK!

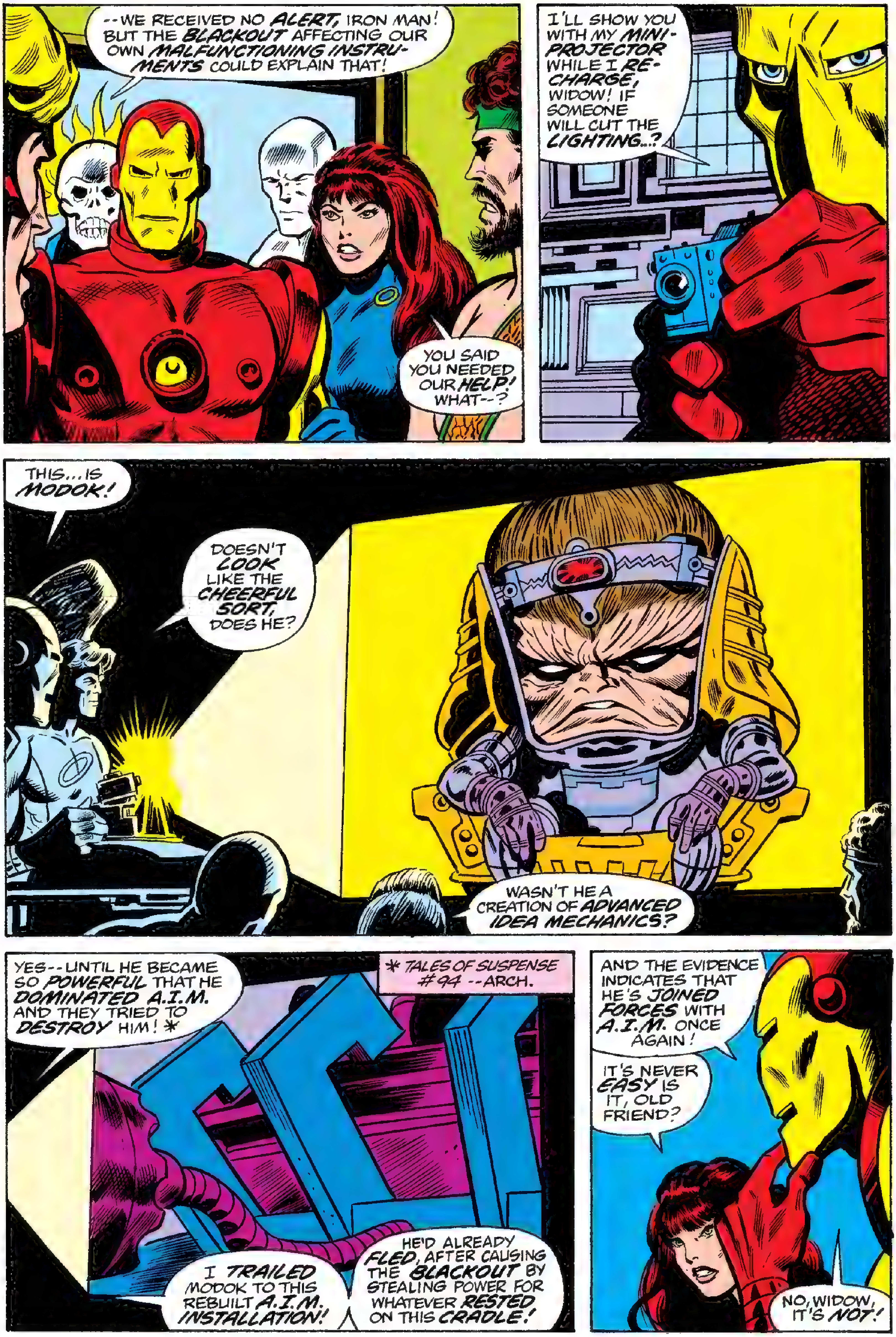

MAGNETIC CHARGE IS *EXPENDED*-- BUT IT *SERVED* ITS PURPOSE! NOW TO--
--EH?
KLIK!
ZSTROW!
UHHNN!
ONCE AGAIN HIS *ARMOR* TAKES THE *BRUNT* OF THE ATTACK--
--THOUGH, *WITHIN* THE GLEAMING SUIT, *TONY STARK* IS *BATTERED* JUST ENOUGH--
KWOM!
--TO MAKE HIM VERY, *VERY MAD!*
REPULSORS WILL MAKE SHORT WORK OF TANK! BUT--
ZAP!

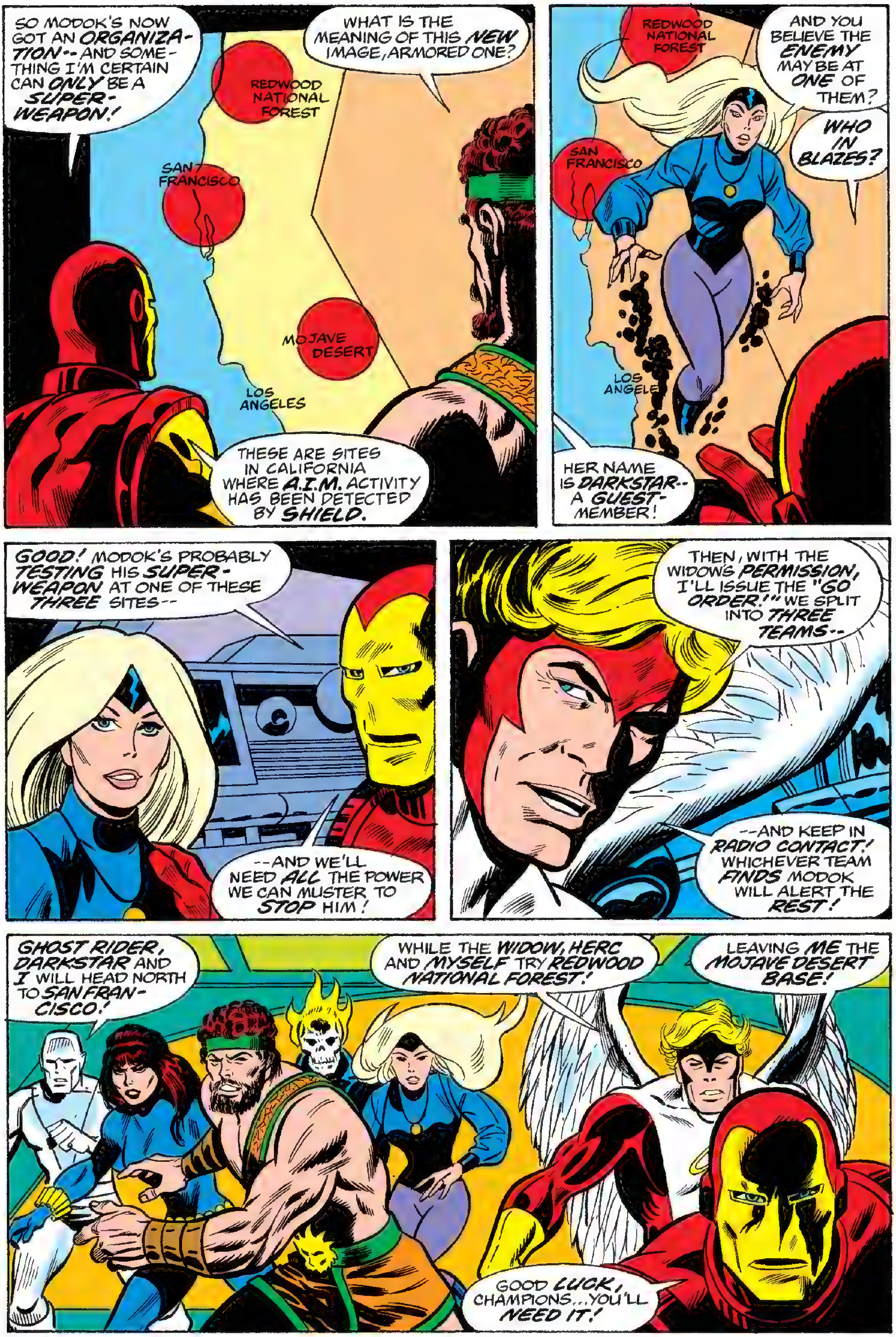

--SOMETHING'S *WRONG* HERE! MODOK *KNOWS* THESE THINGS CAN'T *STOP* ME! MY GUESS IS THAT HE'S ALREADY *GONE!*
I'M BEING *DELAYED* WHILE HE MAKES GOOD HIS *ESCAPE!*
--AND IF THAT'S THE *CASE*--
--THEN I'VE JUST ABOUT HAD--
--ENOUGH!
VRAAK!
ALL RIGHT, *PARTYTIME'S OVER!* DESPITE ITS IMPRESSIVE *SIZE*, THIS BASE SERVES NO OTHER PURPOSE THAN TO *RELAY ENERGY!*
ENERGY STOLEN-- BLACKING OUT THE ENTIRE *PACIFIC COAST!*
MODOK WOULDN'T *DARE* DIVERT SUCH POTENTIALLY *DESTRUCTIVE* FORCE HERE--

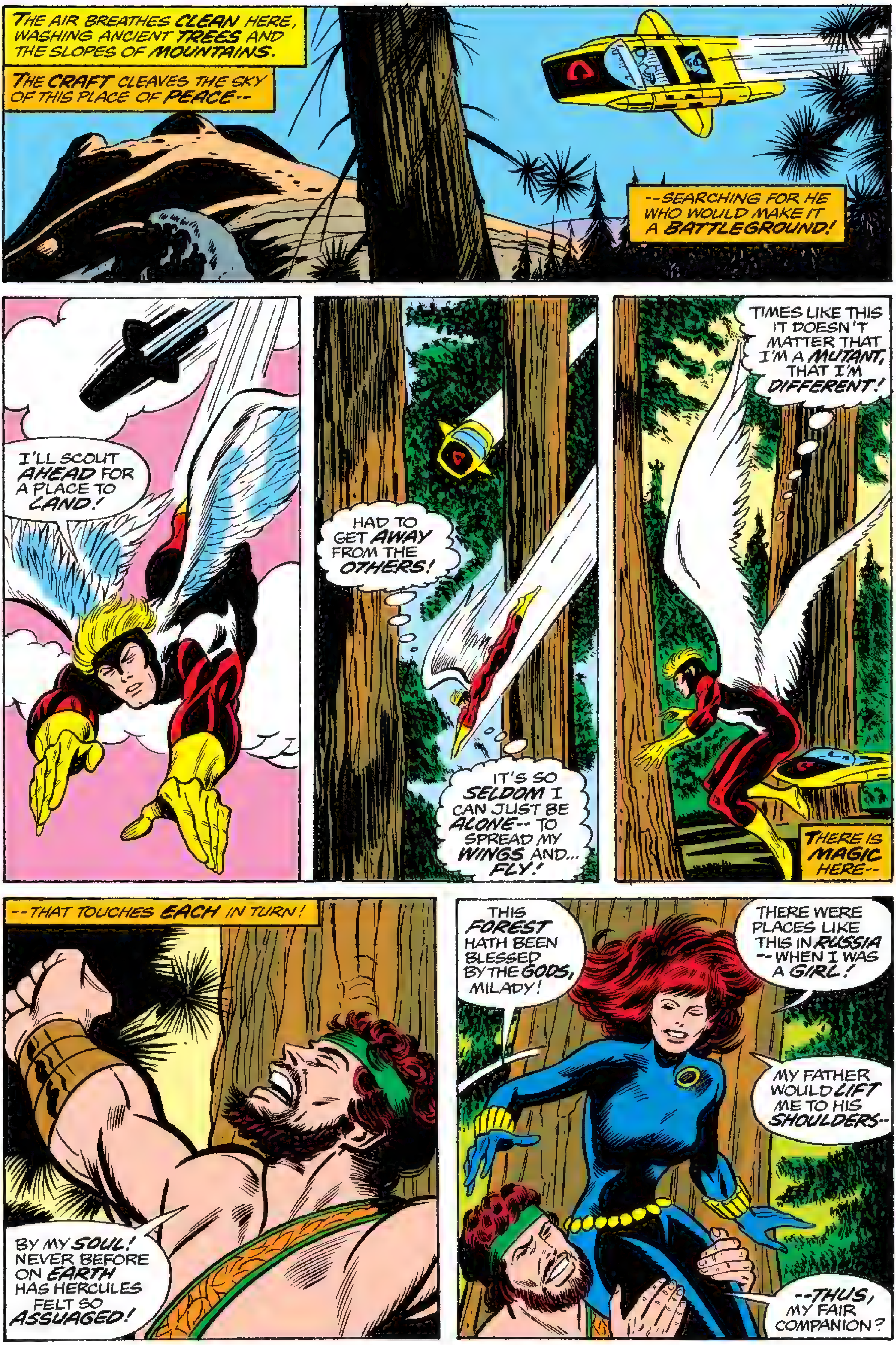

--UNLESS HE HAD DEVELOPED SOME *IN-CREDIBLE* MEANS OF *STORING* SUCH ENERGIES!
ALL THE *RELAYS* LEAD TO THIS *CRADLE*, BUT WHATEVER *IT* HELD--
--IS *GONE!* I'M TOO LATE!
YOU DON'T NEED A DEGREE IN *PHYSICS* TO KNOW THAT, *DANGEROUS* AS MODOK *ALREADY* IS--
--*MOBILE*, AND *ARMED* WITH A *WEAPON* OF INCONCEIVABLE POWER, HE MAY BE VIRTUALLY *UNSTOPPABLE!*
BUT THERE MAY BE A *CHANCE!* IT'S TOO LATE TO CONTACT THE *AVENGERS*, BUT TWO *EX*-AVENGERS ARE ALREADY *HERE* ON THE *COAST!*
THE *BLACK WIDOW* AND *HERCULES!* PART OF A NEW *SUPER-GROUP*--

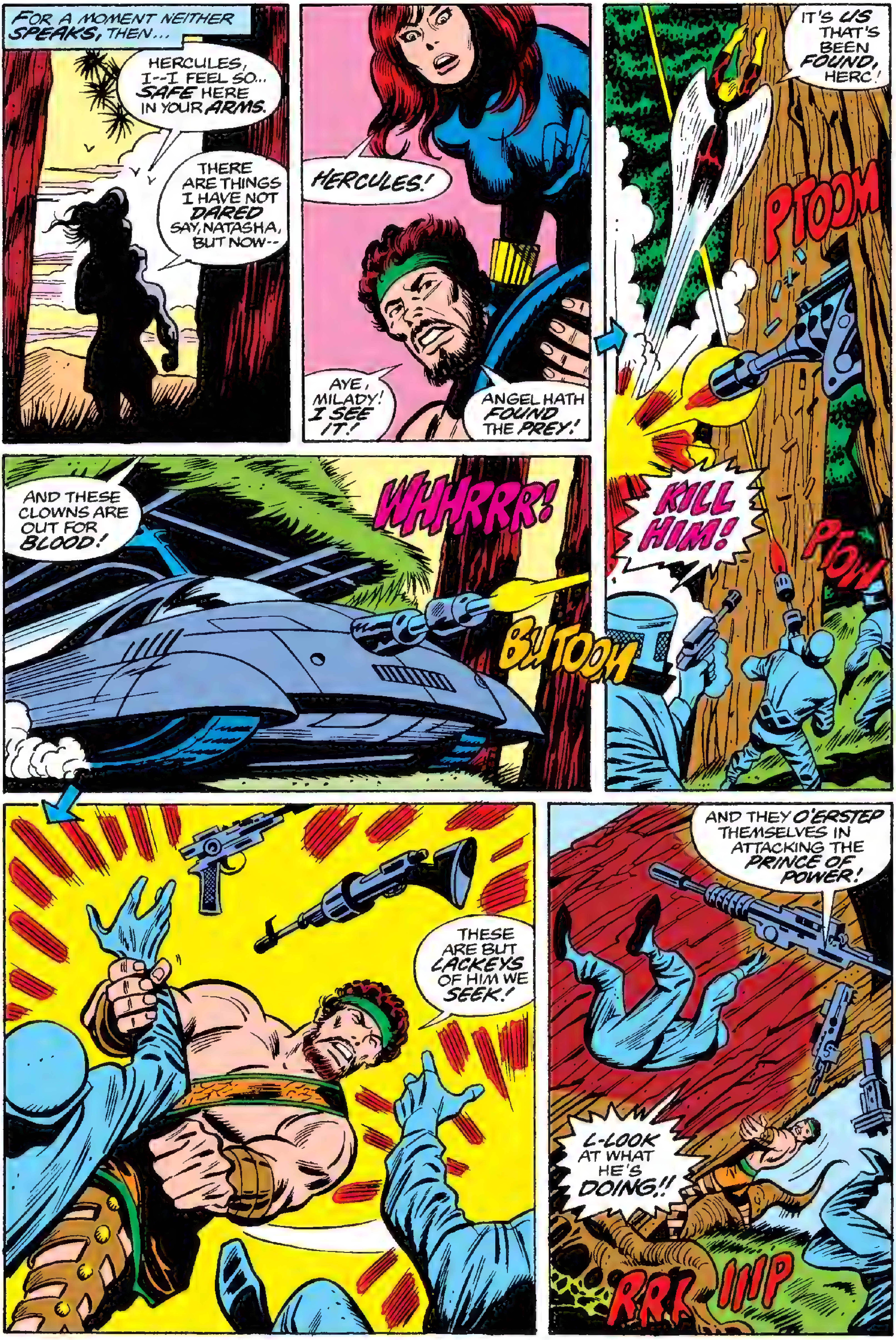

"--THE CHAMPIONS!"
AND, A FEW HUNDRED MILES LATER...
THEY DON'T RESPOND TO MY RADIO ALERT!
AND STEEL SHUTTERS ARE SEALING THE TOP FLOORS AUTOMATICALLY AT MY APPROACH!
I HATE TO DO THIS TO THEIR DEFENSE SYSTEM--BUT THERE'S NO TIME FOR A FORMAL INVITATION!
FLIGHT DRAINED POWER! I HAVE TO RECHARGE!
BUTHROOM!
HELLFIRE! WE SPEND ALL DAY TRYING TO RESTORE POWER TO OUR DEFENSES AFTER THE BLACKOUT--
--ONLY TO HAVE THEM GATE-CRASHED--ON THE 25TH FLOOR!
BACK, MORTAL, BEFORE I-- IRON MAN?!
GOOD LORD! THE BLAZING SKULL--HIS VOICE--
CAN HE BE THE REASON MY ALERT WENT UNHEEDED--?
ACTING OUT OF INSTINCT, IRON MAN LEVELS HIS REPULSOR RAYS AND...
ZAM
UNHH!
SSZAK!

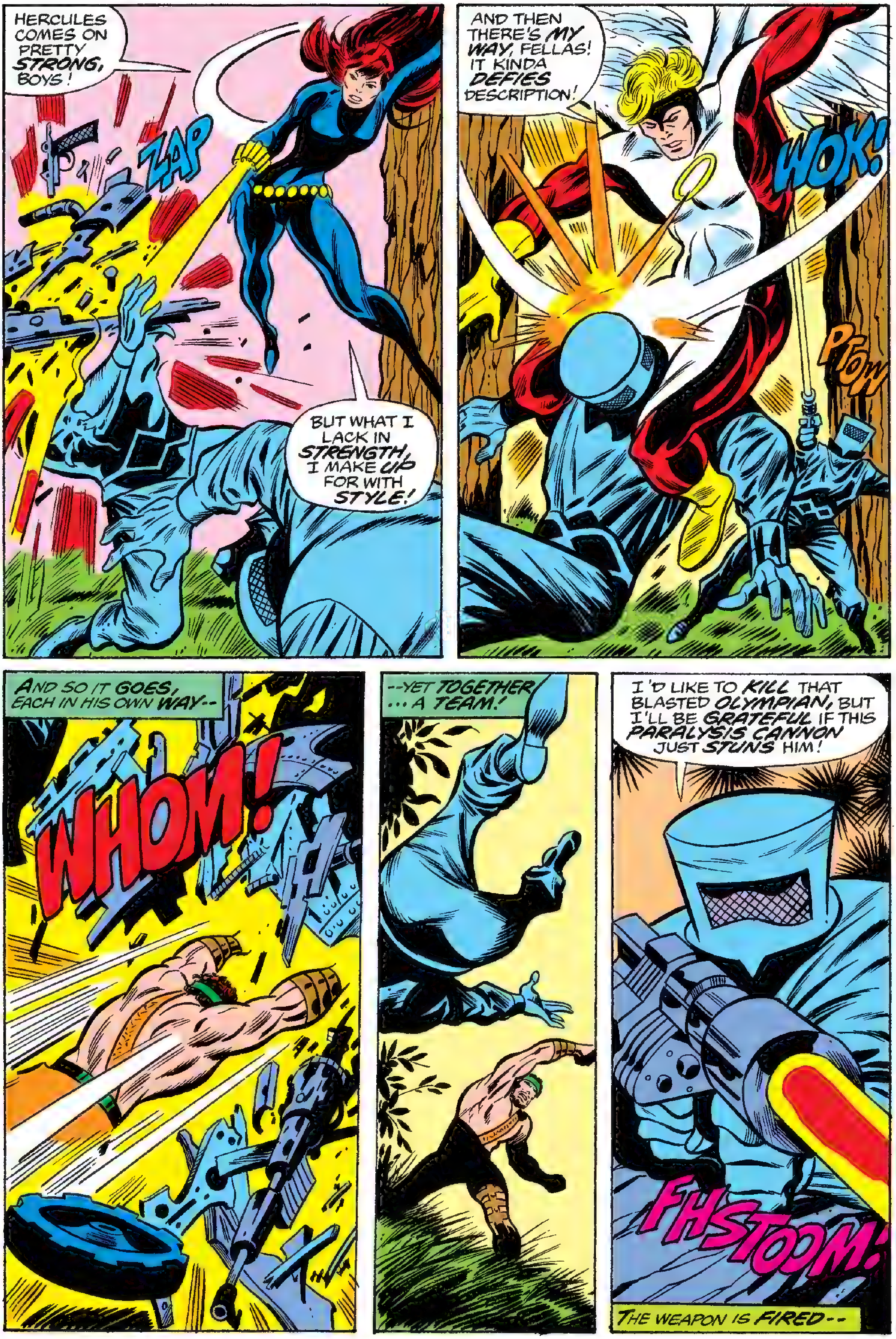

BY THE HOLY HEIGHTS OF OLYMPUS!
GHOST RIDER-- UNDER ATTACK?!
KRASH!
BUT WHO--?
SON, I'M SORRY! I SHOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED YOU, BUT--
--IT'S... UNNERVING TO ACTUALLY SEE YOU IN THE--ER--FLESH!
THAT SINKS IT, TIN MAN! I'M GONNA--
LOOK, I SAID I WAS SORRY AND I MEANT IT!
WAM
BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME TO PLAY GAMES!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU, AVENGER, BUT WHEN YOU ATTACK ONE CHAMPION--
--YOU ATTACK US ALL!
BUT BEFORE A SIMPLE MISUNDERSTANDING CAN ESCALATE INTO A FULL-SCALE WAR...
ALL OF YOU! STOP THIS INSANITY AT ONCE!
MADAME NATASHA-- THE BLACK WIDOW! MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN EVER!
AS THOU SAYEST, MILADY--SO SHALL IT BE!
AND WHEN IRON MAN EXPLAINS THE REASON FOR HIS DRASTIC ENTRANCE...

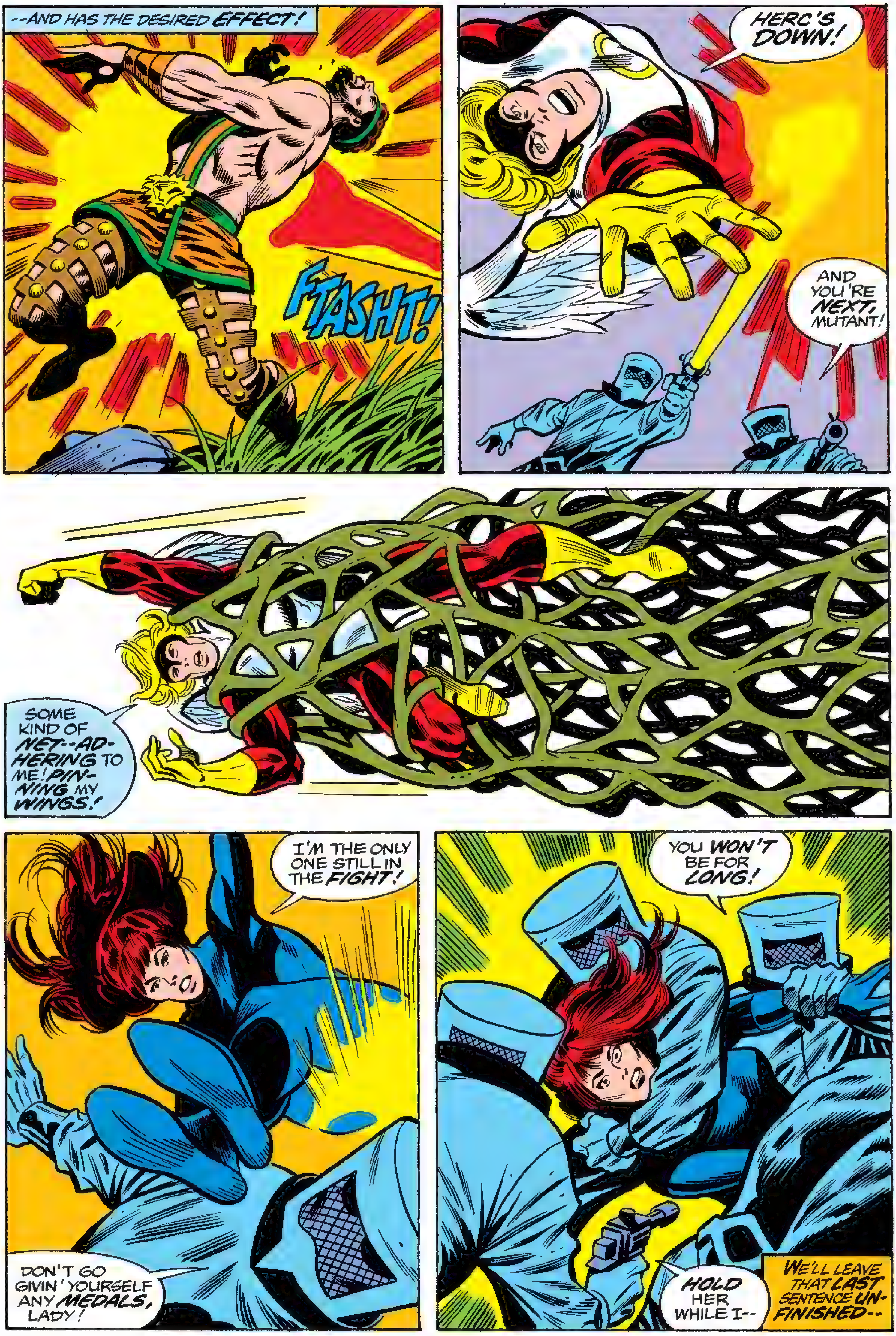

--WE RECEIVED NO ALERT, IRON MAN! BUT THE BLACKOUT AFFECTING OUR OWN MALFUNCTIONING INSTRUMENTS COULD EXPLAIN THAT!
YOU SAID YOU NEEDED OUR HELP! WHAT--?
I'LL SHOW YOU WITH MY MINI-PROJECTOR WHILE I RE-CHARGE, WIDOW! IF SOMEONE WILL CUT THE LIGHTING...?
THIS... IS MODOK!
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE CHEERFUL SORT, DOES HE?
WASN'T HE A CREATION OF ADVANCED IDEA MECHANICS?
YES--UNTIL HE BECAME SO POWERFUL THAT HE DOMINATED A.I.M. AND THEY TRIED TO DESTROY HIM! *
* TALES OF SUSPENSE #94 --ARCH.
I TRAILED MODOK TO THIS REBUILT A.I.M. INSTALLATION!
HE'D ALREADY FLED, AFTER CAUSING THE BLACKOUT BY STEALING POWER FOR WHATEVER RESTED ON THIS CRADLE!
AND THE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT HE'S JOINED FORCES WITH A.I.M. ONCE AGAIN!
IT'S NEVER EASY IS IT, OLD FRIEND?
NO, WIDOW, IT'S NOT!


SO MODOK'S NOW GOT AN ORGANIZATION -- AND SOMETHING I'M CERTAIN CAN ONLY BE A SUPER-WEAPON!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS NEW IMAGE, ARMORED ONE?
REDWOOD NATIONAL FOREST
SAN FRANCISCO
MOJAVE DESERT
LOS ANGELES
THESE ARE SITES IN CALIFORNIA WHERE A.I.M. ACTIVITY HAS BEEN DETECTED BY SHIELD.
REDWOOD NATIONAL FOREST
AND YOU BELIEVE THE ENEMY MAY BE AT ONE OF THEM?
WHO IN BLAZES?
SAN FRANCISCO
LOS ANGELE
HER NAME IS DARKSTAR -- A GUEST-MEMBER!
GOOD! MODOK'S PROBABLY TESTING HIS SUPER-WEAPON AT ONE OF THESE THREE SITES --
--AND WE'LL NEED ALL THE POWER WE CAN MUSTER TO STOP HIM!
THEN, WITH THE WIDOW'S PERMISSION, I'LL ISSUE THE "GO ORDER!" WE SPLIT INTO THREE TEAMS --
--AND KEEP IN RADIO CONTACT! WHICHEVER TEAM FINDS MODOK WILL ALERT THE REST!
GHOST RIDER, DARKSTAR AND I WILL HEAD NORTH TO SAN FRANCISCO!
WHILE THE WIDOW, HERC AND MYSELF TRY REDWOOD NATIONAL FOREST!
LEAVING ME THE MOJAVE DESERT BASE!
GOOD LUCK, CHAMPIONS... YOU'LL NEED IT!

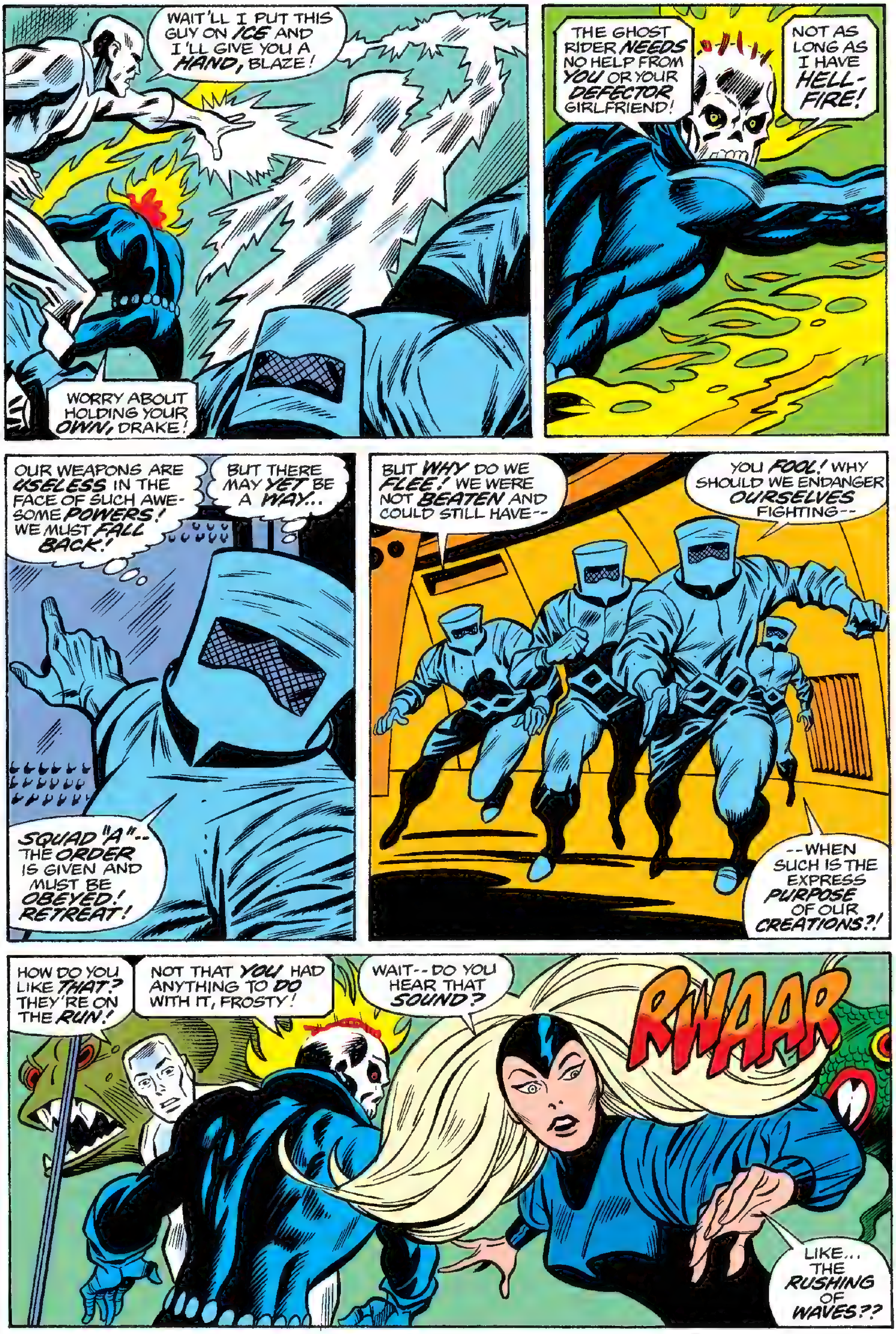

THE AIR BREATHES CLEAN HERE, WASHING ANCIENT TREES AND THE SLOPES OF MOUNTAINS.
THE CRAFT CLEAVES THE SKY OF THIS PLACE OF PEACE--
--SEARCHING FOR HE WHO WOULD MAKE IT A BATTLEGROUND!
I'LL SCOUT AHEAD FOR A PLACE TO LAND!
HAD TO GET AWAY FROM THE OTHERS!
IT'S SO SELDOM I CAN JUST BE ALONE-- TO SPREAD MY WINGS AND... FLY!
TIMES LIKE THIS IT DOESN'T MATTER THAT I'M A MUTANT, THAT I'M DIFFERENT!
THERE IS MAGIC HERE--
--THAT TOUCHES EACH IN TURN!
BY MY SOUL! NEVER BEFORE ON EARTH HAS HERCULES FELT SO ASSUAGED!
THIS FOREST HATH BEEN BLESSED BY THE GODS, MILADY!
THERE WERE PLACES LIKE THIS IN RUSSIA --WHEN I WAS A GIRL!
MY FATHER WOULD LIFT ME TO HIS SHOULDERS--
--THUS, MY FAIR COMPANION?

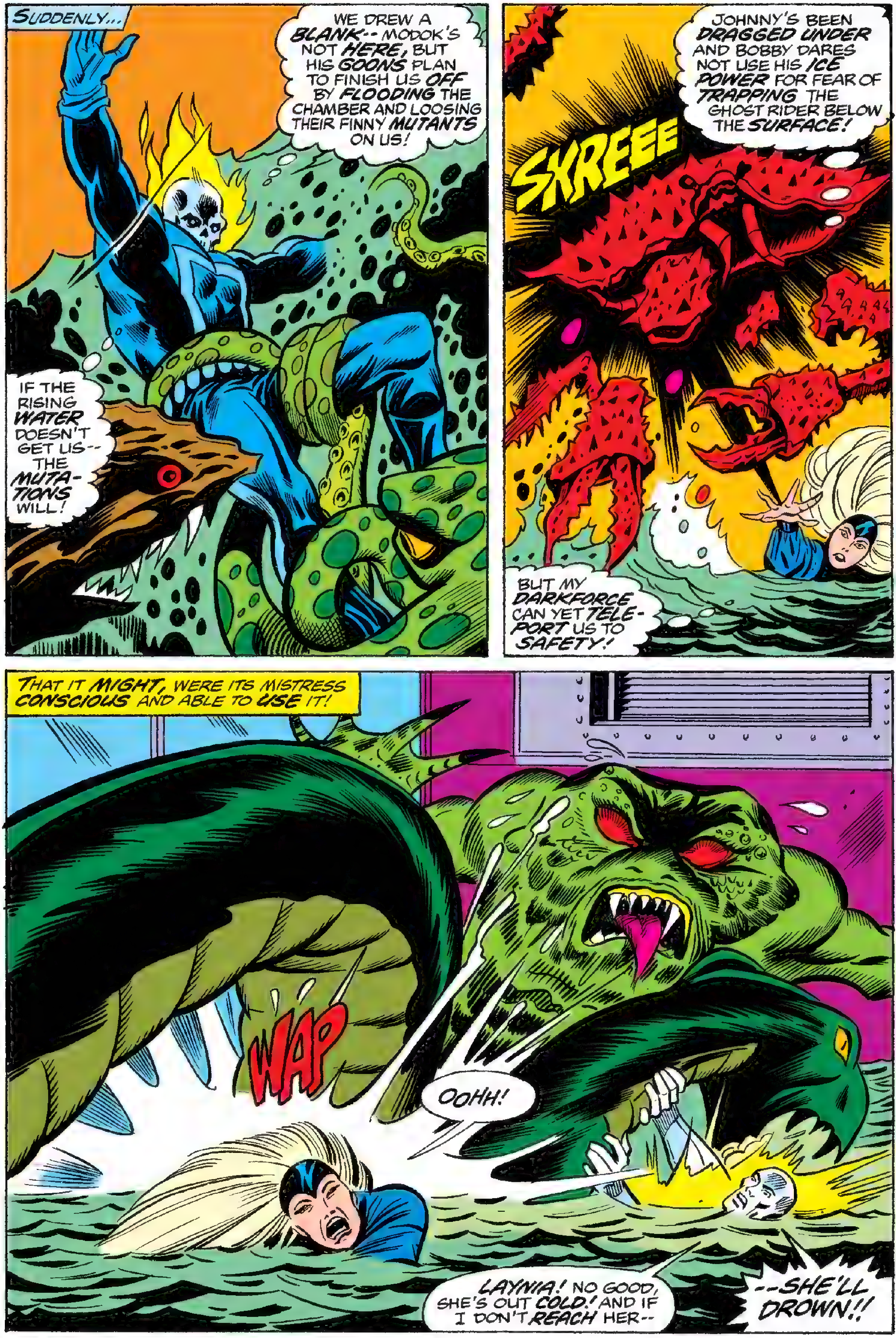

FOR A MOMENT NEITHER SPEAKS, THEN...
HERCULES, I--I FEEL SO... SAFE HERE IN YOUR ARMS.
THERE ARE THINGS I HAVE NOT DARED SAY, NATASHA, BUT NOW--
HERCULES!
AYE, MILADY! I SEE IT!
ANGEL HATH FOUND THE PREY!
IT'S US THAT'S BEEN FOUND, HERC!
PTOOM
KILL HIM!
PTOW
AND THESE CLOWNS ARE OUT FOR BLOOD!
WHHRRR!
BUTOOM
THESE ARE BUT LACKEYS OF HIM WE SEEK!
AND THEY O'ERSTEP THEMSELVES IN ATTACKING THE PRINCE OF POWER!
L-LOOK AT WHAT HE'S DOING!!
RRRIIIP

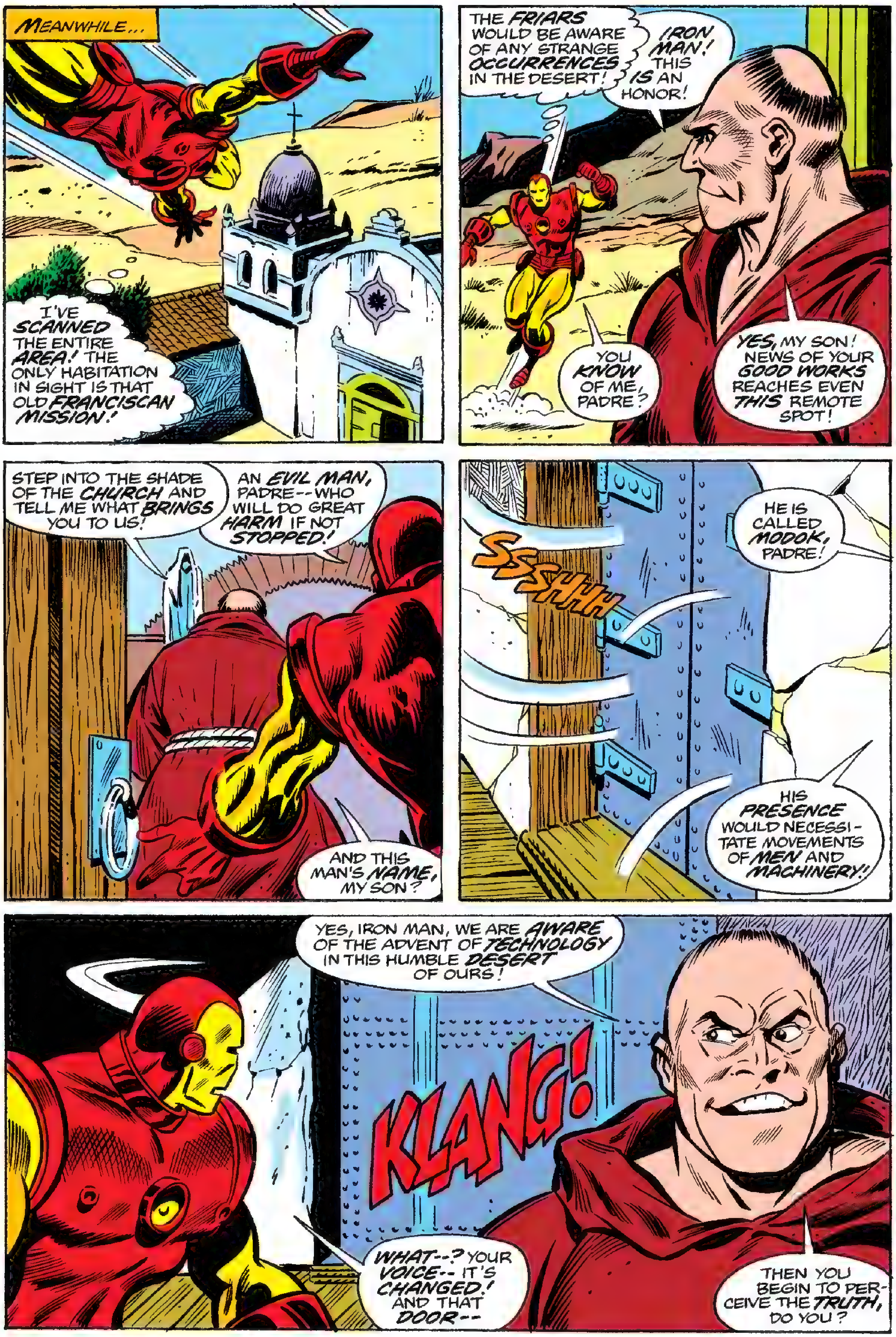

HERCULES COMES ON PRETTY STRONG, BOYS!
ZAP
BUT WHAT I LACK IN STRENGTH, I MAKE UP FOR WITH STYLE!
AND THEN THERE'S MY WAY, FELLAS! IT KINDA DEFIES DESCRIPTION!
WOK!
PTOW
AND SO IT GOES, EACH IN HIS OWN WAY--
WHOM!
--YET TOGETHER ... A TEAM!
I'D LIKE TO KILL THAT BLASTED OLYMPIAN, BUT I'LL BE GRATEFUL IF THIS PARALYSIS CANNON JUST STUNS HIM!
FHSTOOM!
THE WEAPON IS FIRED--

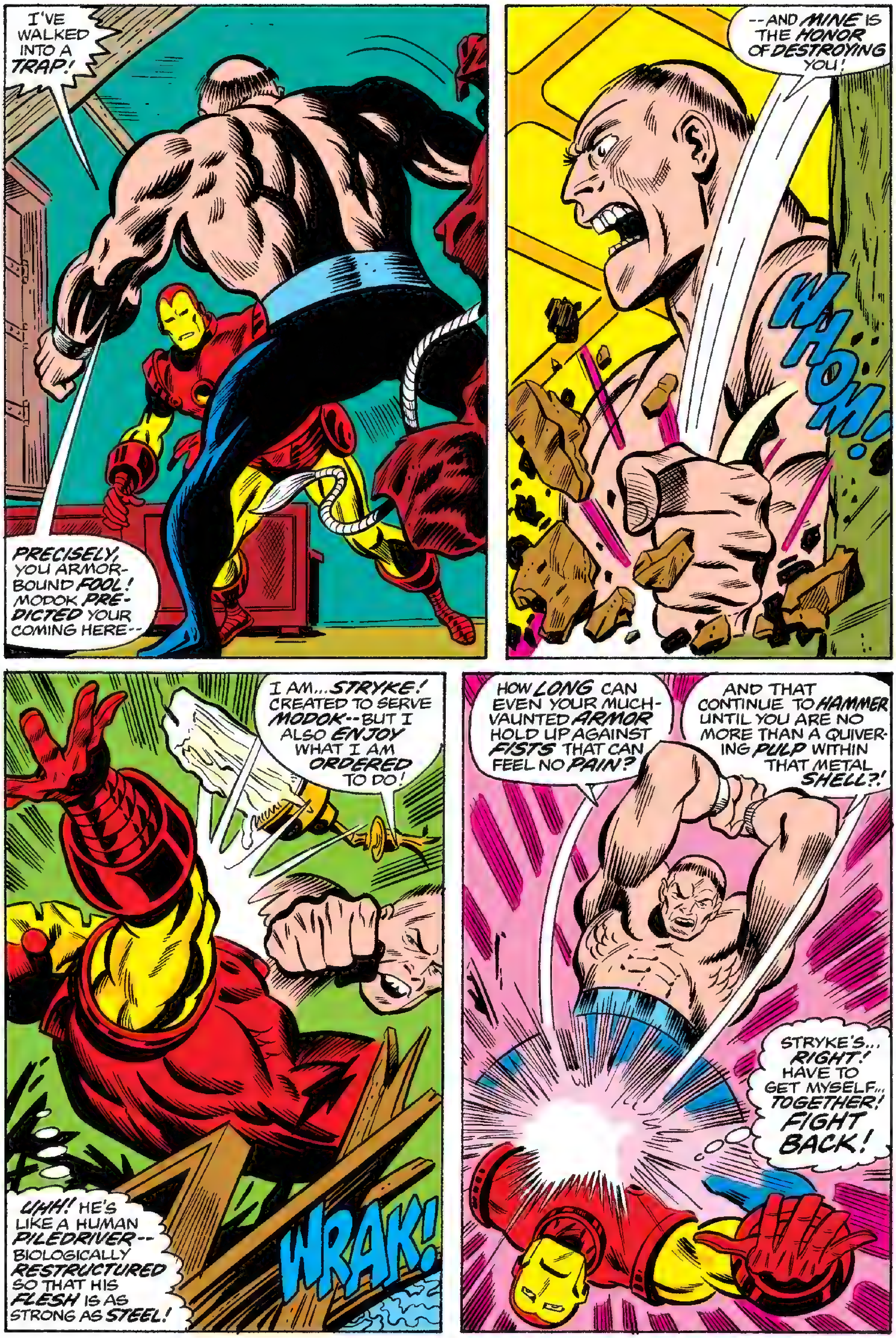

--AND HAS THE DESIRED EFFECT!
FTASHT!
HERC'S DOWN!
AND YOU'RE NEXT, MUTANT!
SOME KIND OF NET--ADHERING TO ME! PINNING MY WINGS!
I'M THE ONLY ONE STILL IN THE FIGHT!
DON'T GO GIVIN' YOURSELF ANY MEDALS, LADY!
YOU WON'T BE FOR LONG!
HOLD HER WHILE I--
WE'LL LEAVE THAT LAST SENTENCE UNFINISHED--

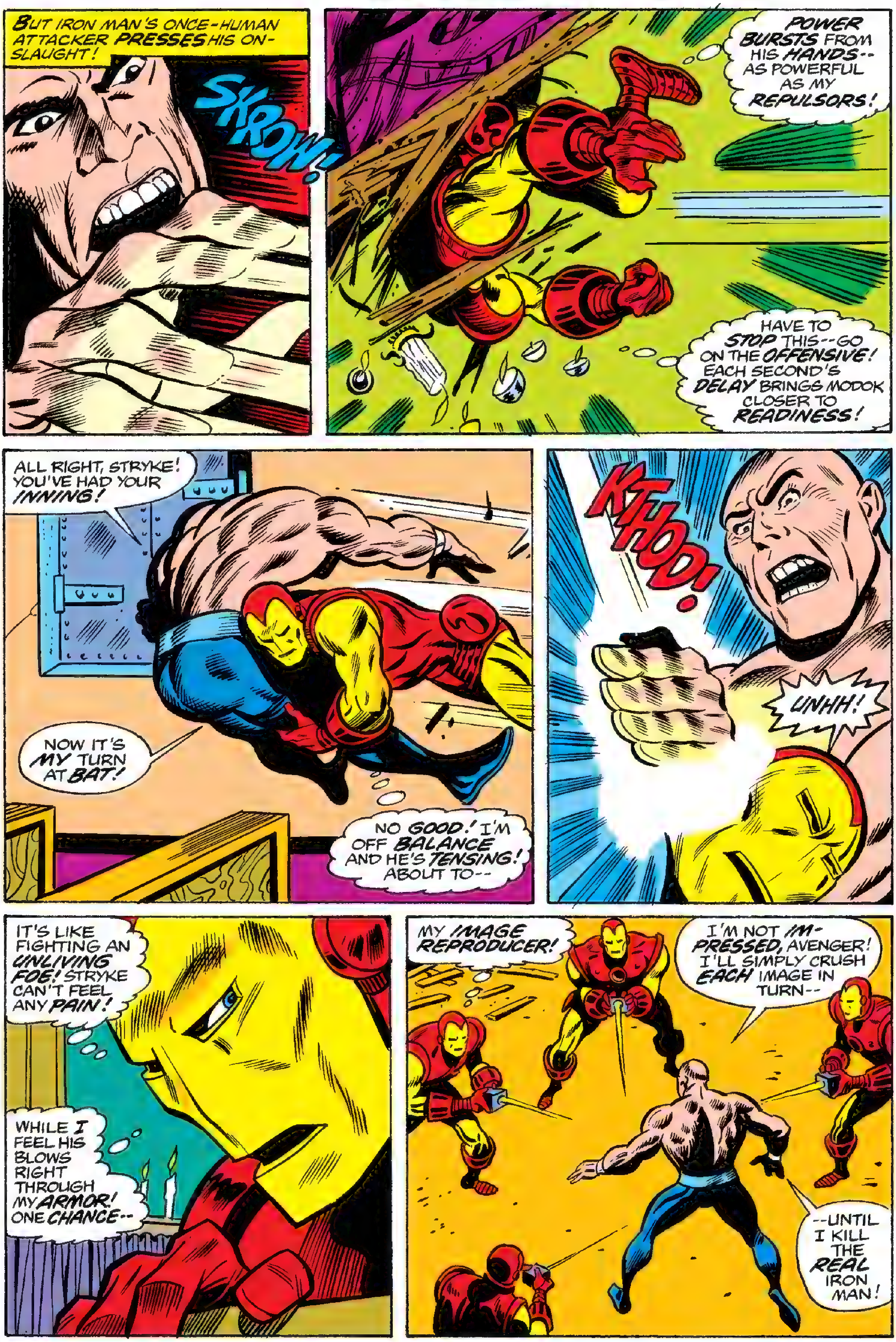
--WHILE WE TRAVEL DOWN THE CALIFORNIA COASTLINE--
T-5
A.I.M.
--TO A STRANGE INSTALLATION SUBMERGED IN THE BLUE WATERS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY--
--AND JOIN A DEADLY BATTLE ALREADY IN PROGRESS!
MODOK ISN'T HERE, BUT WE'VE STUMBLED INTO SOMETHING JUST AS VILE! A BASE THAT'S TAKING ORDINARY SEA-LIFE--
--AND MUTATING IT INTO HORRIBLE, MONSTROUS FORMS!
GET THEM! WE CAN'T BE STOPPED NOW!

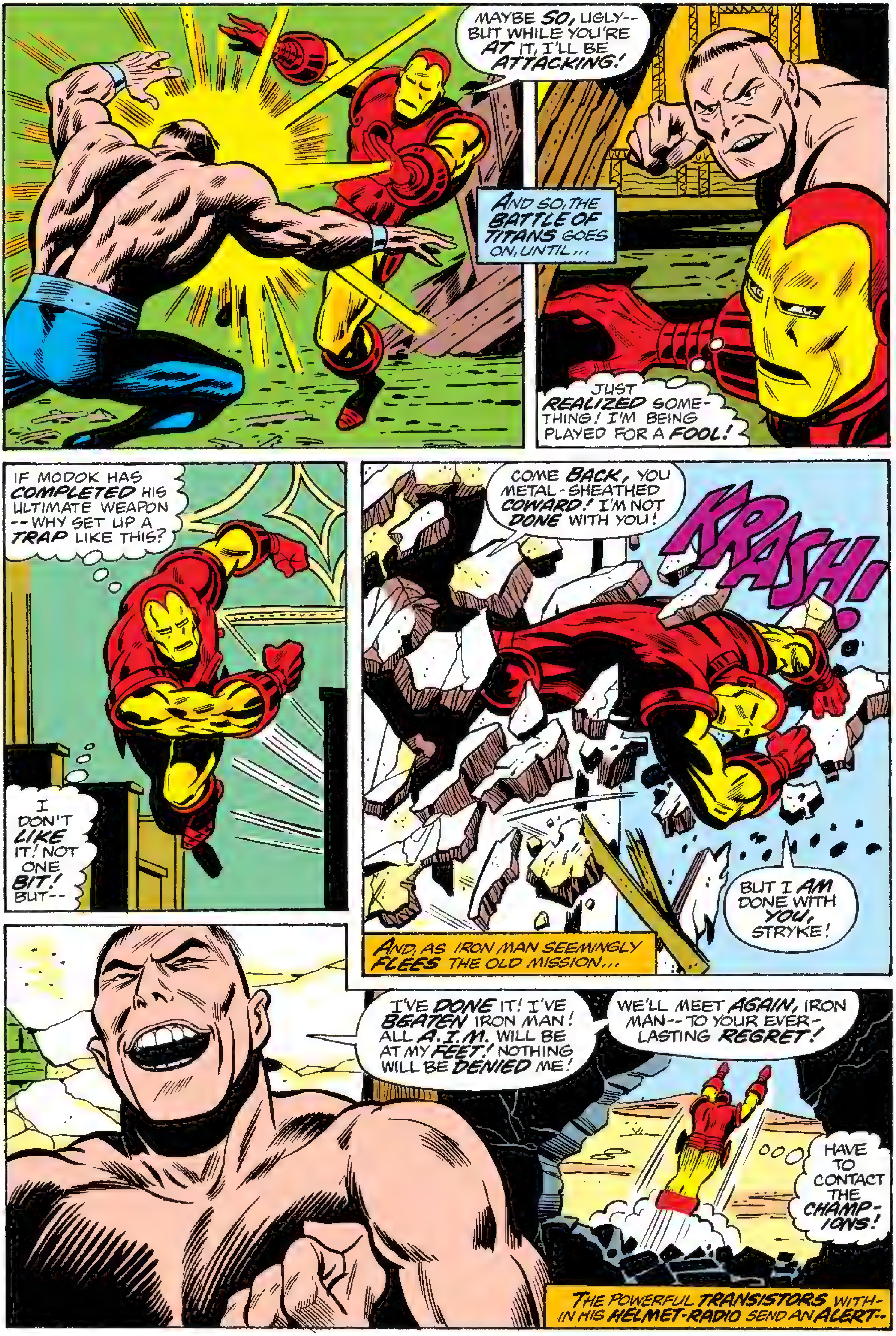

WAIT'LL I PUT THIS GUY ON ICE AND I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND, BLAZE!
WORRY ABOUT HOLDING YOUR OWN, DRAKE!
THE GHOST RIDER NEEDS NO HELP FROM YOU OR YOUR DEFECTOR GIRLFRIEND!
NOT AS LONG AS I HAVE HELL-FIRE!
OUR WEAPONS ARE USELESS IN THE FACE OF SUCH AWESOME POWERS! WE MUST FALL BACK!
BUT THERE MAY YET BE A WAY...
SQUAD "A"-- THE ORDER IS GIVEN AND MUST BE OBEYED! RETREAT!
BUT WHY DO WE FLEE! WE WERE NOT BEATEN AND COULD STILL HAVE--
YOU FOOL! WHY SHOULD WE ENDANGER OURSELVES FIGHTING--
--WHEN SUCH IS THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF OUR CREATIONS?!
HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT? THEY'RE ON THE RUN!
NOT THAT YOU HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT, FROSTY!
WAIT-- DO YOU HEAR THAT SOUND?
RWAAR
LIKE... THE RUSHING OF WAVES??

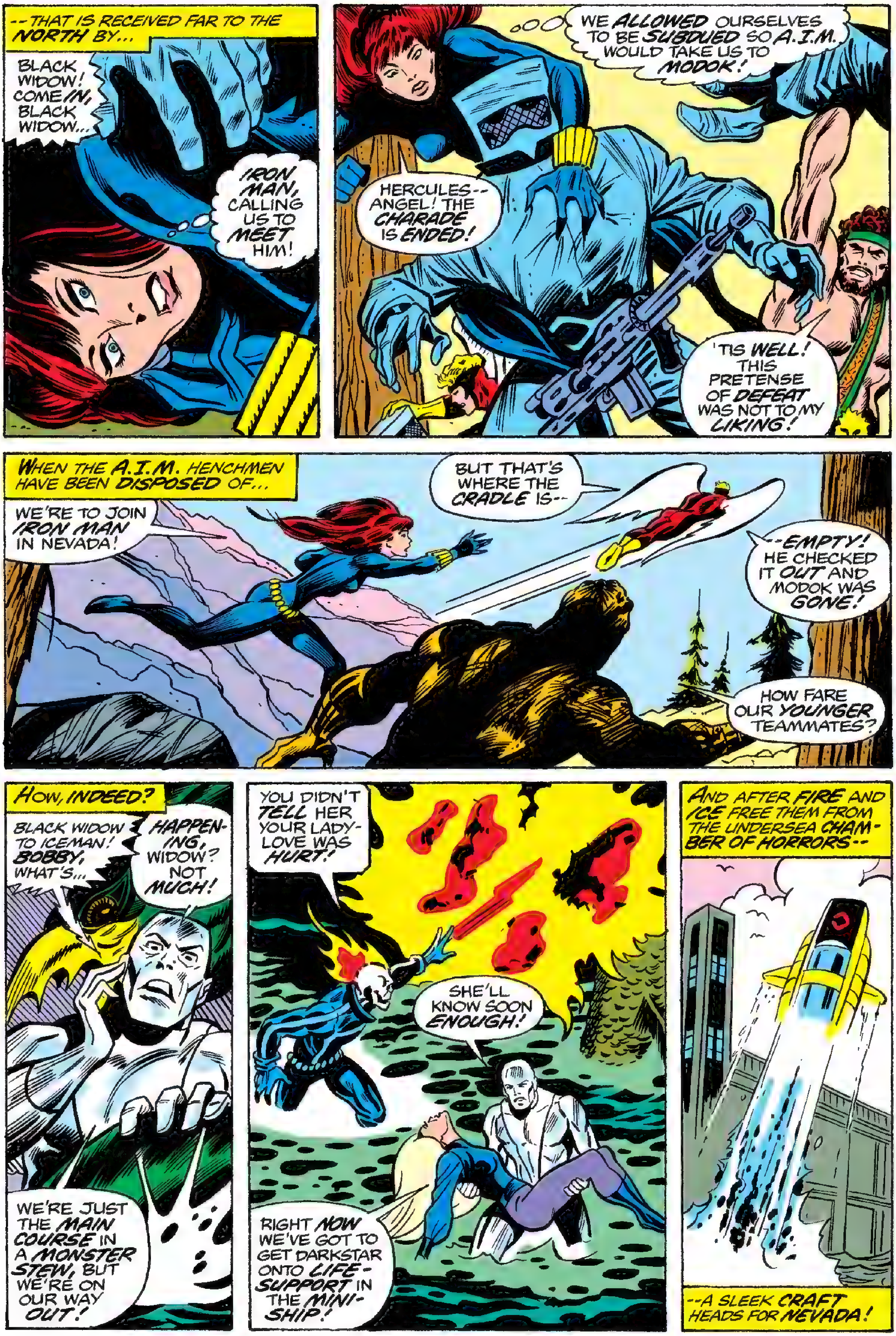

SUDDENLY...
WE DREW A BLANK-- MODOK'S NOT HERE, BUT HIS GOONS PLAN TO FINISH US OFF BY FLOODING THE CHAMBER AND LOOSING THEIR FINNY MUTANTS ON US!
IF THE RISING WATER DOESN'T GET US-- THE MUTATIONS WILL!
JOHNNY'S BEEN DRAGGED UNDER AND BOBBY DARES NOT USE HIS ICE POWER FOR FEAR OF TRAPPING THE GHOST RIDER BELOW THE SURFACE!
SKREEE
BUT MY DARKFORCE CAN YET TELEPORT US TO SAFETY!
THAT IT MIGHT, WERE ITS MISTRESS CONSCIOUS AND ABLE TO USE IT!
WAP
OOHH!
LAYNIA! NO GOOD, SHE'S OUT COLD! AND IF I DON'T REACH HER--
--SHE'LL DROWN!!

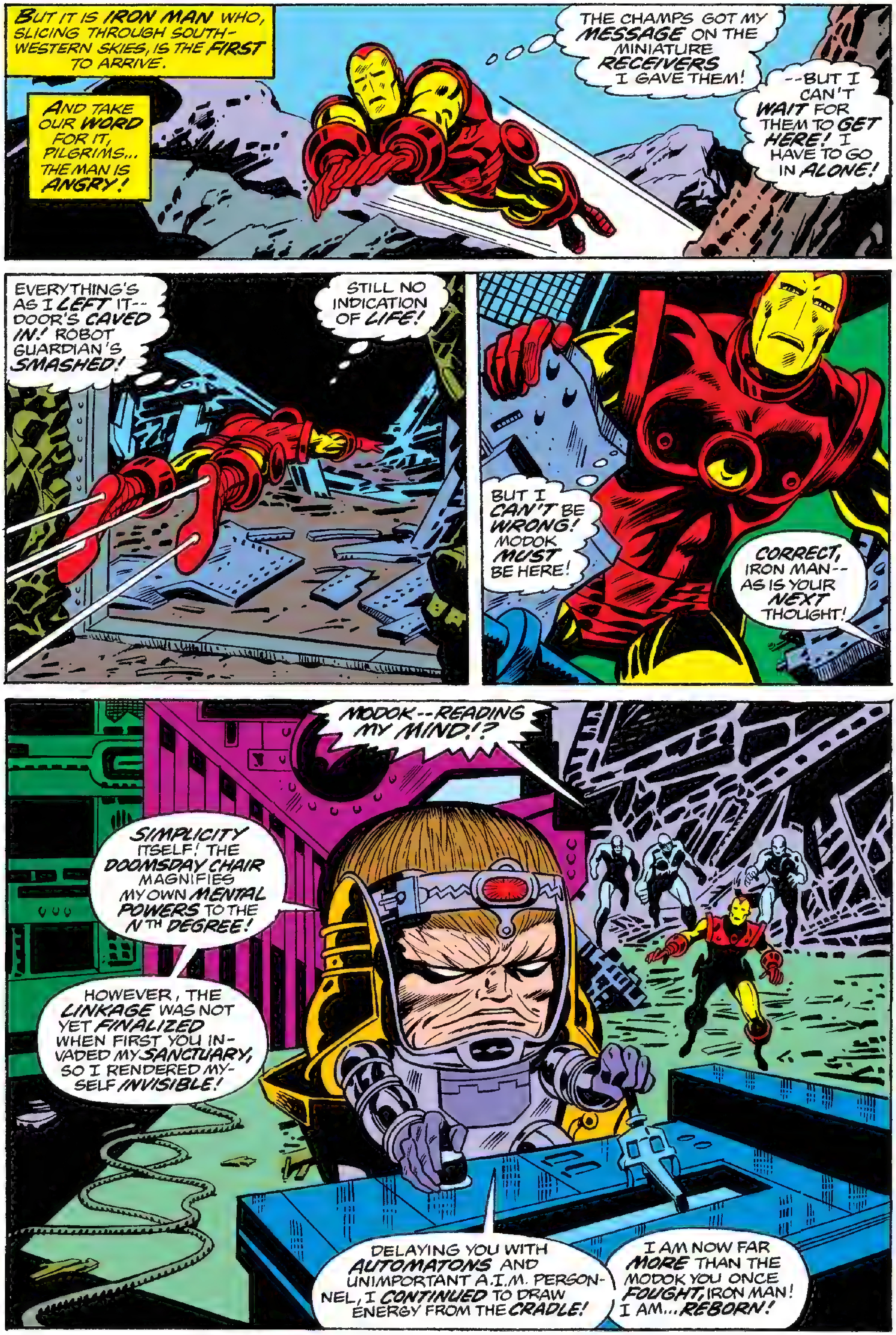

MEANWHILE...
I'VE SCANNED THE ENTIRE AREA! THE ONLY HABITATION IN SIGHT IS THAT OLD FRANCISCAN MISSION!
THE FRIARS WOULD BE AWARE OF ANY STRANGE OCCURRENCES IN THE DESERT!
IRON MAN! THIS IS AN HONOR!
YOU KNOW OF ME, PADRE?
YES, MY SON! NEWS OF YOUR GOOD WORKS REACHES EVEN THIS REMOTE SPOT!
STEP INTO THE SHADE OF THE CHURCH AND TELL ME WHAT BRINGS YOU TO US!
AN EVIL MAN, PADRE-- WHO WILL DO GREAT HARM IF NOT STOPPED!
AND THIS MAN'S NAME, MY SON?
SSSHHH
HE IS CALLED MODOK, PADRE!
HIS PRESENCE WOULD NECESSITATE MOVEMENTS OF MEN AND MACHINERY!
YES, IRON MAN, WE ARE AWARE OF THE ADVENT OF TECHNOLOGY IN THIS HUMBLE DESERT OF OURS!
KLANG!
WHAT--? YOUR VOICE-- IT'S CHANGED! AND THAT DOOR--
THEN YOU BEGIN TO PERCEIVE THE TRUTH, DO YOU?

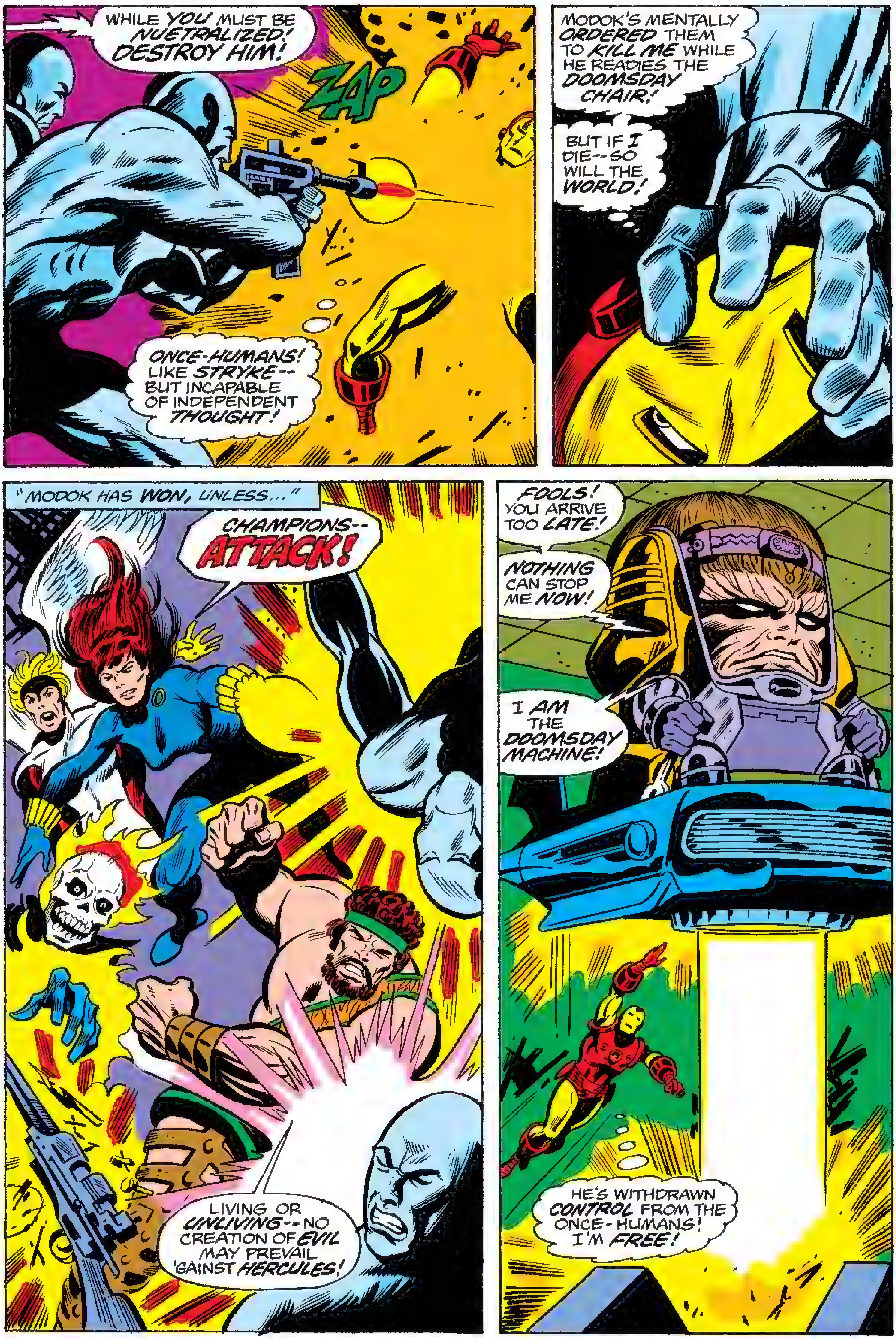

I'VE WALKED INTO A TRAP!
PRECISELY, YOU ARMOR-BOUND FOOL! MODOK PREDICTED YOUR COMING HERE--
--AND MINE IS THE HONOR OF DESTROYING YOU!
WHOM!
I AM... STRYKE! CREATED TO SERVE MODOK--BUT I ALSO ENJOY WHAT I AM ORDERED TO DO!
UHH! HE'S LIKE A HUMAN PILEDRIVER-- BIOLOGICALLY RESTRUCTURED SO THAT HIS FLESH IS AS STRONG AS STEEL!
WRAK!
HOW LONG CAN EVEN YOUR MUCH-VAUNTED ARMOR HOLD UP AGAINST FISTS THAT CAN FEEL NO PAIN?
AND THAT CONTINUE TO HAMMER UNTIL YOU ARE NO MORE THAN A QUIVERING PULP WITHIN THAT METAL SHELL?!
STRYKE'S... RIGHT! HAVE TO GET MYSELF... TOGETHER! FIGHT BACK!

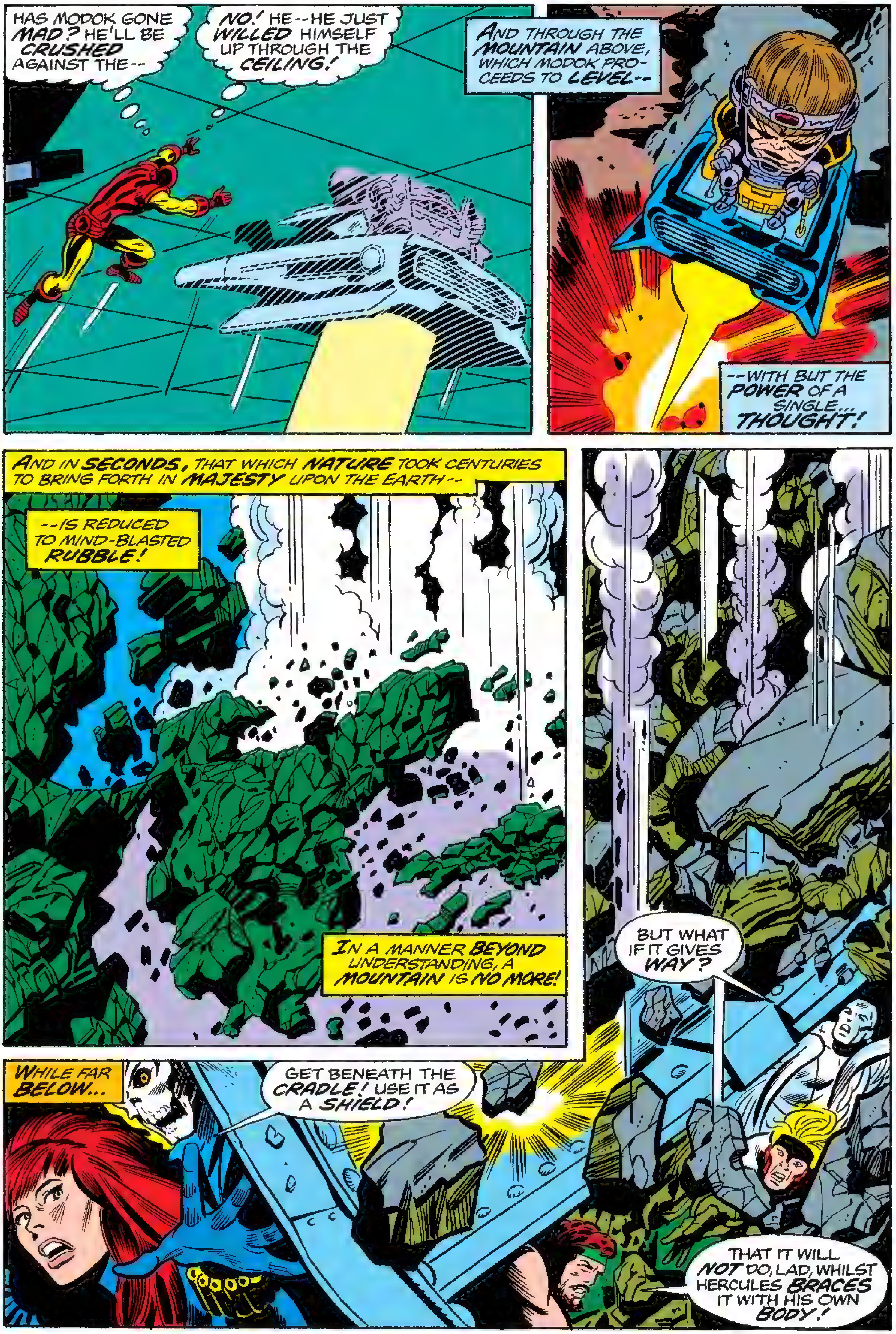

BUT IRON MAN'S ONCE-HUMAN ATTACKER PRESSES HIS ONSLAUGHT!
SKROW!
POWER BURSTS FROM HIS HANDS-- AS POWERFUL AS MY REPULSORS!
HAVE TO STOP THIS--GO ON THE OFFENSIVE! EACH SECOND'S DELAY BRINGS MODOK CLOSER TO READINESS!
ALL RIGHT, STRYKE! YOU'VE HAD YOUR INNING!
NOW IT'S MY TURN AT BAT!
NO GOOD! I'M OFF BALANCE AND HE'S TENSING! ABOUT TO--
KTHOD!
UNHH!
IT'S LIKE FIGHTING AN UNLIVING FOE! STRYKE CAN'T FEEL ANY PAIN!
WHILE I FEEL HIS BLOWS RIGHT THROUGH MY ARMOR! ONE CHANCE--
MY IMAGE REPRODUCER!
I'M NOT IMPRESSED, AVENGER! I'LL SIMPLY CRUSH EACH IMAGE IN TURN--
--UNTIL I KILL THE REAL IRON MAN!

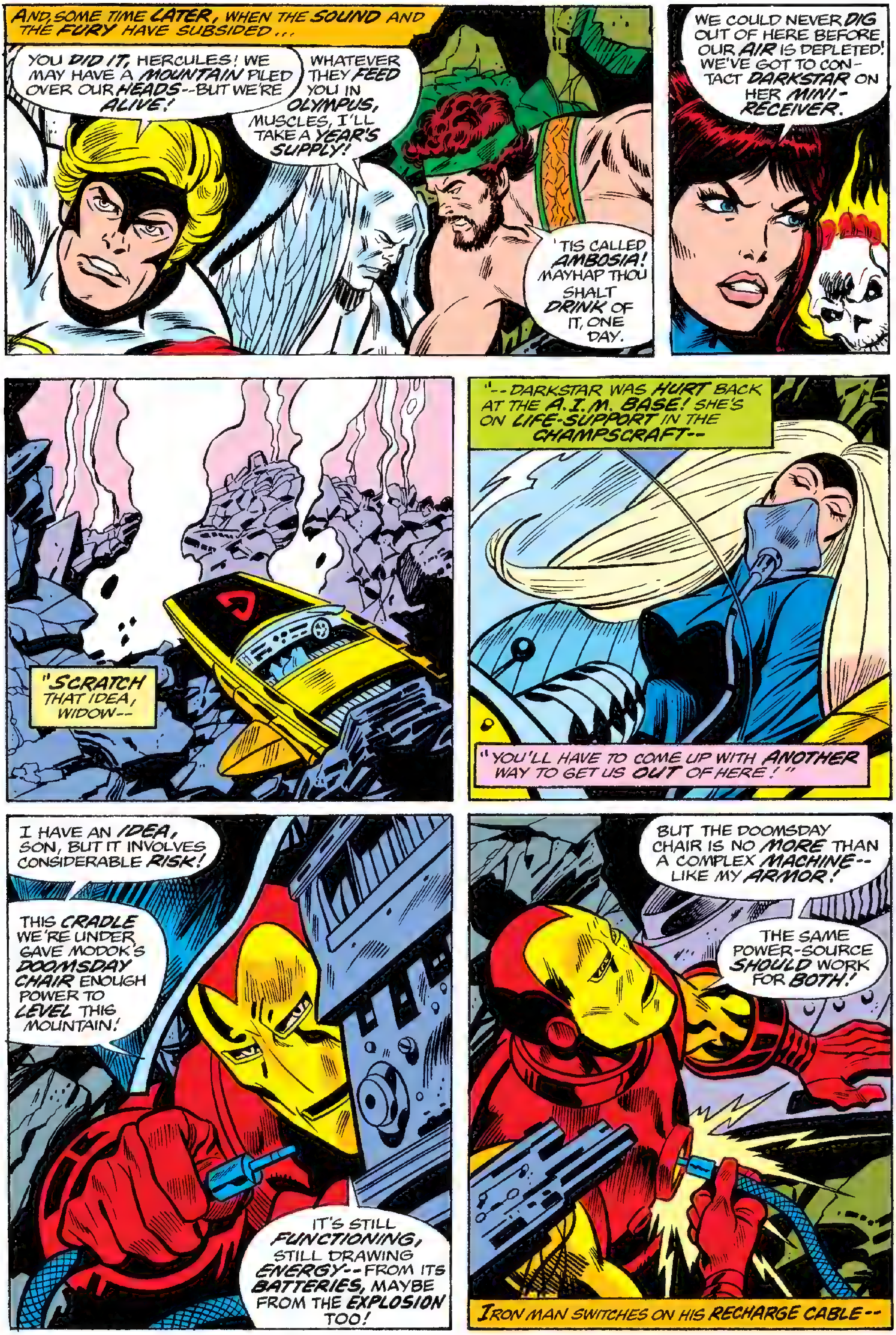

MAYBE SO, UGLY-- BUT WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, I'LL BE ATTACKING!
AND SO, THE BATTLE OF TITANS GOES ON, UNTIL...
JUST REALIZED SOMETHING! I'M BEING PLAYED FOR A FOOL!
IF MODOK HAS COMPLETED HIS ULTIMATE WEAPON --WHY SET UP A TRAP LIKE THIS?
I DON'T LIKE IT! NOT ONE BIT! BUT--
COME BACK, YOU METAL-SHEATHED COWARD! I'M NOT DONE WITH YOU!
KRASH!
BUT I AM DONE WITH YOU, STRYKE!
AND, AS IRON MAN SEEMINGLY FLEES THE OLD MISSION...
I'VE DONE IT! I'VE BEATEN IRON MAN! ALL A.I.M. WILL BE AT MY FEET! NOTHING WILL BE DENIED ME!
WE'LL MEET AGAIN, IRON MAN--TO YOUR EVERLASTING REGRET!
HAVE TO CONTACT THE CHAMPIONS!
THE POWERFUL TRANSISTORS WITHIN HIS HELMET-RADIO SEND AN ALERT--

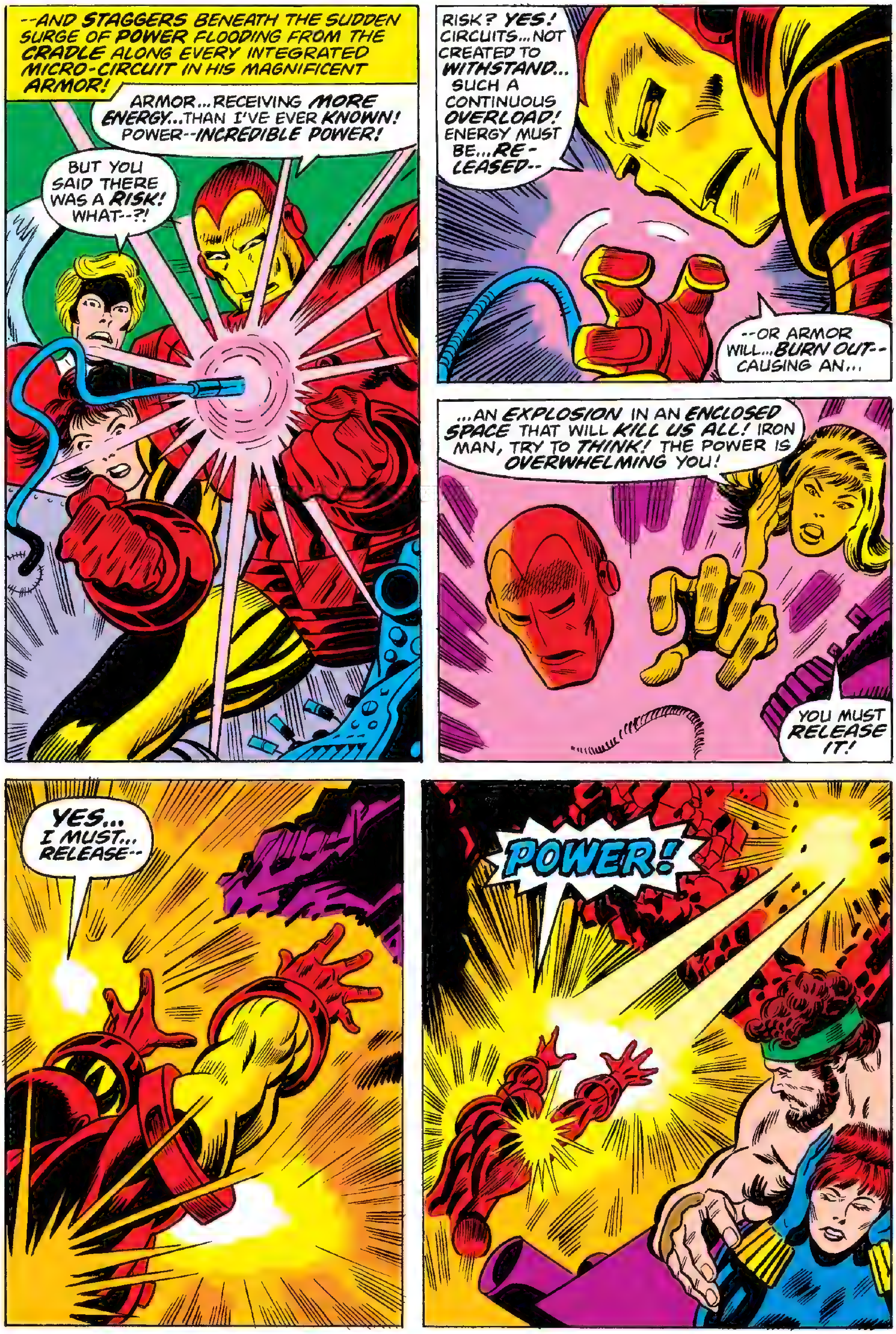

--THAT IS RECEIVED FAR TO THE NORTH BY...
BLACK WIDOW! COME IN, BLACK WIDOW...
IRON MAN, CALLING US TO MEET HIM!
WE ALLOWED OURSELVES TO BE SUBDUED SO A.I.M. WOULD TAKE US TO MODOK!
HERCULES--ANGEL! THE CHARADE IS ENDED!
'TIS WELL! THIS PRETENSE OF DEFEAT WAS NOT TO MY LIKING!
WHEN THE A.I.M. HENCHMEN HAVE BEEN DISPOSED OF...
WE'RE TO JOIN IRON MAN IN NEVADA!
BUT THAT'S WHERE THE CRADLE IS--
--EMPTY! HE CHECKED IT OUT AND MODOK WAS GONE!
HOW FARE OUR YOUNGER TEAMMATES?
HOW, INDEED?
BLACK WIDOW TO ICEMAN! BOBBY, WHAT'S...
HAPPENING, WIDOW? NOT MUCH!
WE'RE JUST THE MAIN COURSE IN A MONSTER STEW, BUT WE'RE ON OUR WAY OUT!
YOU DIDN'T TELL HER YOUR LADY-LOVE WAS HURT!
SHE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH!
RIGHT NOW WE'VE GOT TO GET DARKSTAR ONTO LIFE-SUPPORT IN THE MINI-SHIP!
AND AFTER FIRE AND ICE FREE THEM FROM THE UNDERSEA CHAMBER OF HORRORS--
--A SLEEK CRAFT HEADS FOR NEVADA!

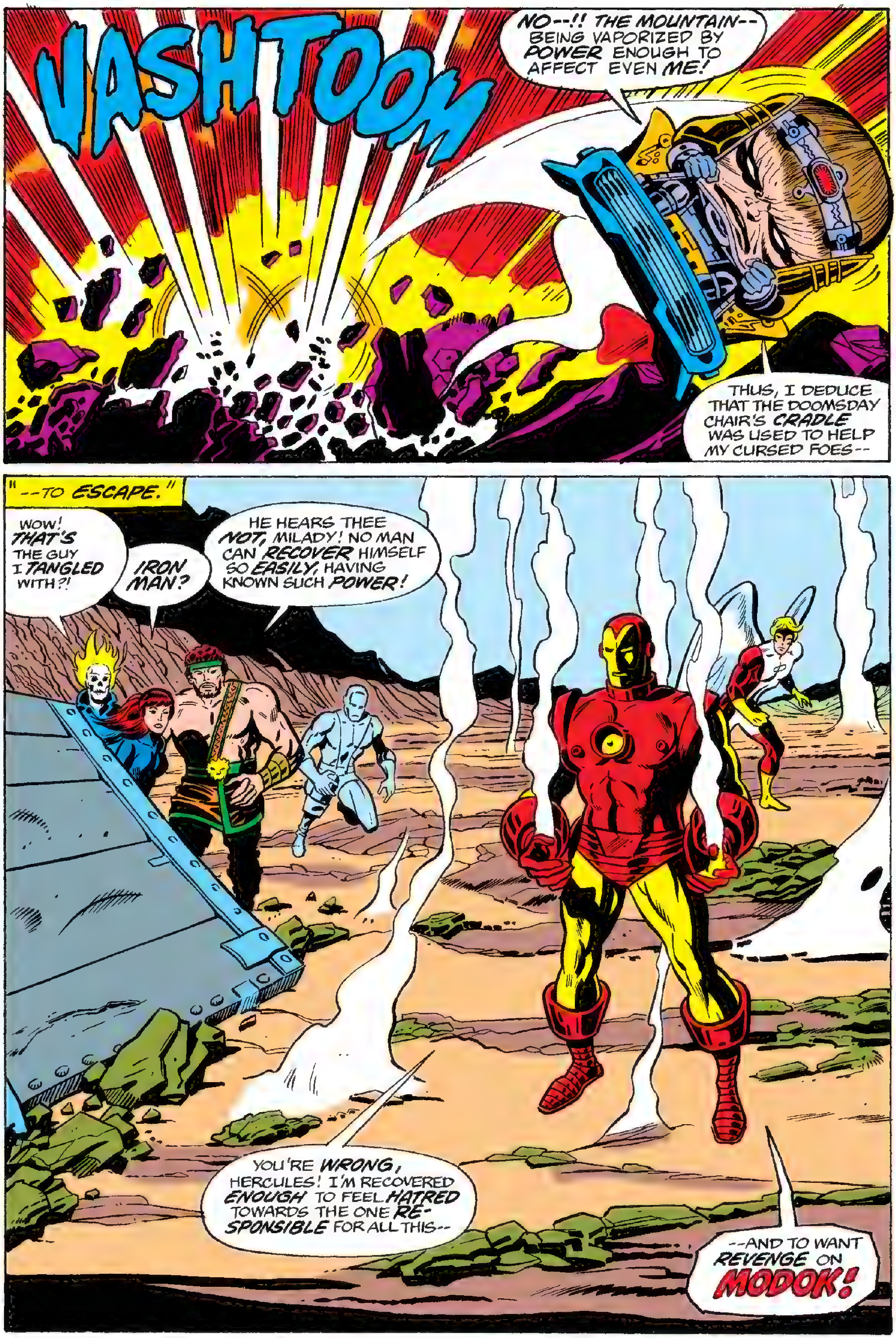

BUT IT IS IRON MAN WHO, SLICING THROUGH SOUTH-WESTERN SKIES, IS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE.
AND TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT, PILGRIMS... THE MAN IS ANGRY!
THE CHAMPS GOT MY MESSAGE ON THE MINIATURE RECEIVERS I GAVE THEM!
--BUT I CAN'T WAIT FOR THEM TO GET HERE! I HAVE TO GO IN ALONE!
EVERYTHING'S AS I LEFT IT--DOOR'S CAVED IN! ROBOT GUARDIAN'S SMASHED!
STILL NO INDICATION OF LIFE!
BUT I CAN'T BE WRONG! MODOK MUST BE HERE!
CORRECT, IRON MAN--AS IS YOUR NEXT THOUGHT!
MODOK--READING MY MIND!?
SIMPLICITY ITSELF! THE DOOMSDAY CHAIR MAGNIFIES MY OWN MENTAL POWERS TO THE N^{TH} DEGREE!
HOWEVER, THE LINKAGE WAS NOT YET FINALIZED WHEN FIRST YOU INVADED MY SANCTUARY, SO I RENDERED MYSELF INVISIBLE!
DELAYING YOU WITH AUTOMATONS AND UNIMPORTANT A.I.M. PERSONNEL, I CONTINUED TO DRAW ENERGY FROM THE CRADLE!
I AM NOW FAR MORE THAN THE MODOK YOU ONCE FOUGHT, IRON MAN! I AM... REBORN!

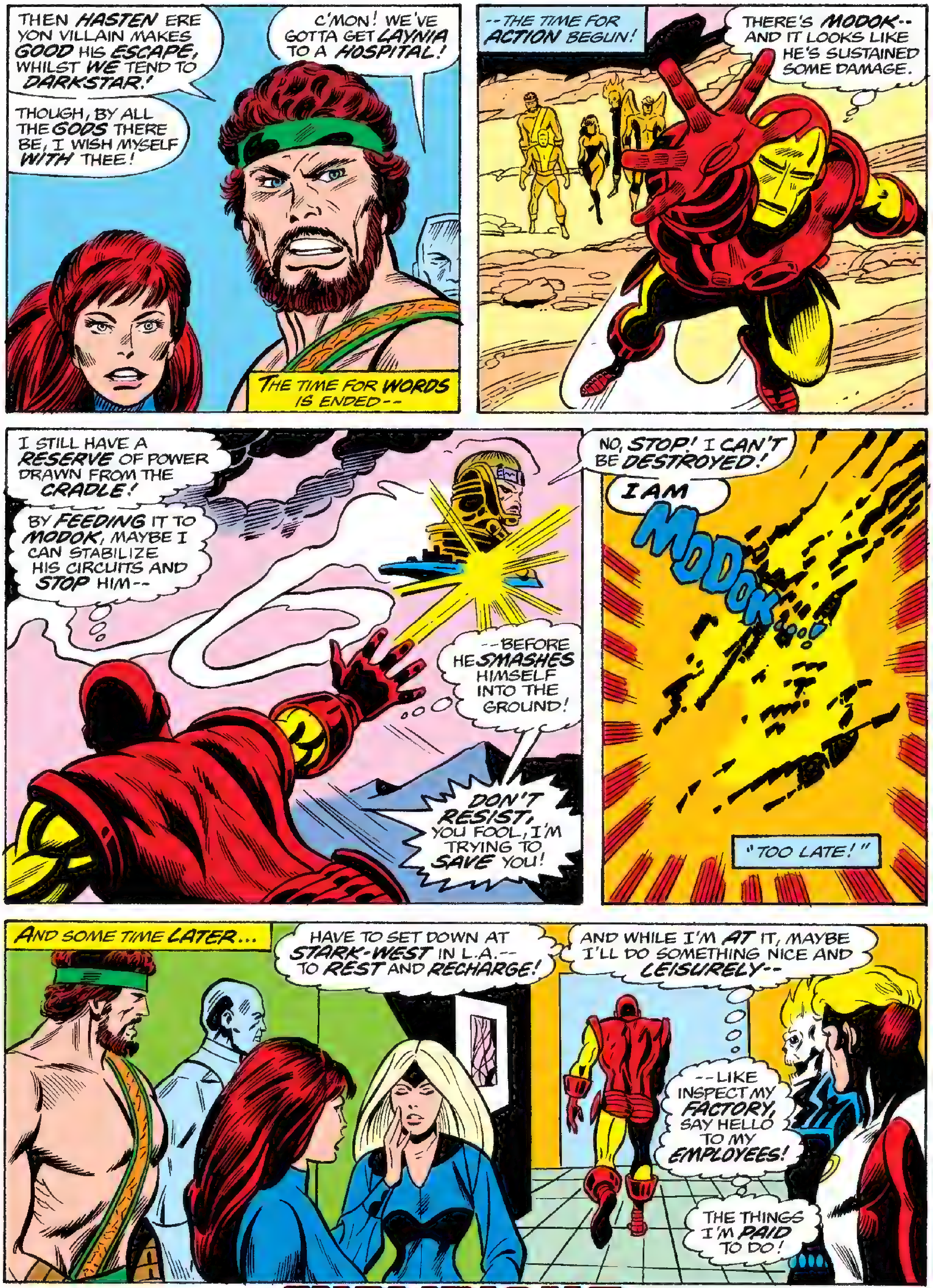

WHILE YOU MUST BE NUETRALIZED! DESTROY HIM!
ZAP
ONCE-HUMANS! LIKE STRYKE-- BUT INCAPABLE OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT!
MODOK'S MENTALLY ORDERED THEM TO KILL ME WHILE HE READIES THE DOOMSDAY CHAIR!
BUT IF I DIE--SO WILL THE WORLD!
"MODOK HAS WON, UNLESS..."
CHAMPIONS-- ATTACK!
LIVING OR UNLIVING--NO CREATION OF EVIL MAY PREVAIL 'GAINST HERCULES!
FOOLS! YOU ARRIVE TOO LATE!
NOTHING CAN STOP ME NOW!
I AM THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE!
HE'S WITHDRAWN CONTROL FROM THE ONCE-HUMANS! I'M FREE!


HAS MODOK GONE MAD? HE'LL BE CRUSHED AGAINST THE--
NO! HE--HE JUST WILLED HIMSELF UP THROUGH THE CEILING!
AND THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN ABOVE, WHICH MODOK PROCEEDS TO LEVEL--
--WITH BUT THE POWER OF A SINGLE... THOUGHT!
AND IN SECONDS, THAT WHICH NATURE TOOK CENTURIES TO BRING FORTH IN MAJESTY UPON THE EARTH--
--IS REDUCED TO MIND-BLASTED RUBBLE!
IN A MANNER BEYOND UNDERSTANDING, A MOUNTAIN IS NO MORE!
WHILE FAR BELOW...
GET BENEATH THE CRADLE! USE IT AS A SHIELD!
BUT WHAT IF IT GIVES WAY?
THAT IT WILL NOT DO, LAD, WHILST HERCULES BRACES IT WITH HIS OWN BODY!


AND, SOME TIME LATER, WHEN THE SOUND AND THE FURY HAVE SUBSIDED...
YOU DID IT, HERCULES! WE MAY HAVE A MOUNTAIN PILED OVER OUR HEADS--BUT WE'RE ALIVE!
WHATEVER THEY FEED YOU IN OLYMPUS, MUSCLES, I'LL TAKE A YEAR'S SUPPLY!
'TIS CALLED AMBOSIA! MAYHAP THOU SHALT DRINK OF IT, ONE DAY.
WE COULD NEVER DIG OUT OF HERE BEFORE OUR AIR IS DEPLETED! WE'VE GOT TO CONTACT DARKSTAR ON HER MINI-RECEIVER.
"SCRATCH THAT IDEA, WIDOW--
"--DARKSTAR WAS HURT BACK AT THE A.I.M. BASE! SHE'S ON LIFE-SUPPORT IN THE CHAMPSCRAFT--
"YOU'LL HAVE TO COME UP WITH ANOTHER WAY TO GET US OUT OF HERE!"
I HAVE AN IDEA, SON, BUT IT INVOLVES CONSIDERABLE RISK!
THIS CRADLE WE'RE UNDER GAVE MODOK'S DOOMSDAY CHAIR ENOUGH POWER TO LEVEL THIS MOUNTAIN!
IT'S STILL FUNCTIONING, STILL DRAWING ENERGY--FROM ITS BATTERIES, MAYBE FROM THE EXPLOSION TOO!
BUT THE DOOMSDAY CHAIR IS NO MORE THAN A COMPLEX MACHINE--LIKE MY ARMOR!
THE SAME POWER-SOURCE SHOULD WORK FOR BOTH!
IRON MAN SWITCHES ON HIS RECHARGE CABLE--


--AND STAGGERS BENEATH THE SUDDEN SURGE OF POWER FLOODING FROM THE CRADLE ALONG EVERY INTEGRATED MICRO-CIRCUIT IN HIS MAGNIFICENT ARMOR!
ARMOR...RECEIVING MORE ENERGY...THAN I'VE EVER KNOWN! POWER--INCREDIBLE POWER!
BUT YOU SAID THERE WAS A RISK! WHAT--?!
RISK? YES! CIRCUITS...NOT CREATED TO WITHSTAND... SUCH A CONTINUOUS OVERLOAD! ENERGY MUST BE...RELEASED--
--OR ARMOR WILL...BURN OUT--CAUSING AN...
...AN EXPLOSION IN AN ENCLOSED SPACE THAT WILL KILL US ALL! IRON MAN, TRY TO THINK! THE POWER IS OVERWHELMING YOU!
YOU MUST RELEASE IT!
YES... I MUST... RELEASE--
POWER!


VASHTOOM
NO--!! THE MOUNTAIN-- BEING VAPORIZED BY POWER ENOUGH TO AFFECT EVEN ME!
THUS, I DEDUCE THAT THE DOOMSDAY CHAIR'S CRADLE WAS USED TO HELP MY CURSED FOES--
"--TO ESCAPE."
WOW! THAT'S THE GUY I TANGLED WITH?!
IRON MAN?
HE HEARS THEE NOT, MILADY! NO MAN CAN RECOVER HIMSELF SO EASILY, HAVING KNOWN SUCH POWER!
YOU'RE WRONG, HERCULES! I'M RECOVERED ENOUGH TO FEEL HATRED TOWARDS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THIS--
--AND TO WANT REVENGE ON MODOK!


THEN *HASTEN* ERE YON VILLAIN MAKES *GOOD* HIS *ESCAPE*, WHILST *WE* TEND TO *DARKSTAR!*
THOUGH, BY ALL THE *GODS* THERE BE, I WISH MYSELF *WITH* THEE!
C'MON! WE'VE GOTTA GET *LAYNIA* TO A *HOSPITAL!*
THE TIME FOR *WORDS* IS ENDED--
--THE TIME FOR *ACTION* BEGUN!
THERE'S *MODOK*-- AND IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S SUSTAINED SOME DAMAGE.
I STILL HAVE A *RESERVE* OF POWER DRAWN FROM THE *CRADLE!*
BY *FEEDING* IT TO *MODOK*, MAYBE I CAN STABILIZE HIS CIRCUITS AND *STOP* HIM--
--BEFORE HE *SMASHES* HIMSELF INTO THE GROUND!
DON'T RESIST, YOU FOOL, I'M TRYING TO *SAVE* YOU!
NO, *STOP!* I *CAN'T* BE *DESTROYED!*
I AM MODOK...
"TOO LATE!"
AND SOME TIME *LATER*...
HAVE TO SET DOWN AT *STARK-WEST* IN L.A.-- TO *REST* AND *RECHARGE!*
AND WHILE I'M *AT* IT, MAYBE I'LL DO SOMETHING NICE AND *LEISURELY*--
--LIKE INSPECT MY *FACTORY*, SAY HELLO TO MY *EMPLOYEES!*
THE THINGS I'M *PAID* TO DO!

AS TO THE FATE OF DARKSTAR, CHECK OUT **THE CHAMPIONS** *#16, AND DON'T MISS AN ISSUE OF THEIR BLOCK-BUSTING BIMONTHLY BOOK!*

AVENGERS ®
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
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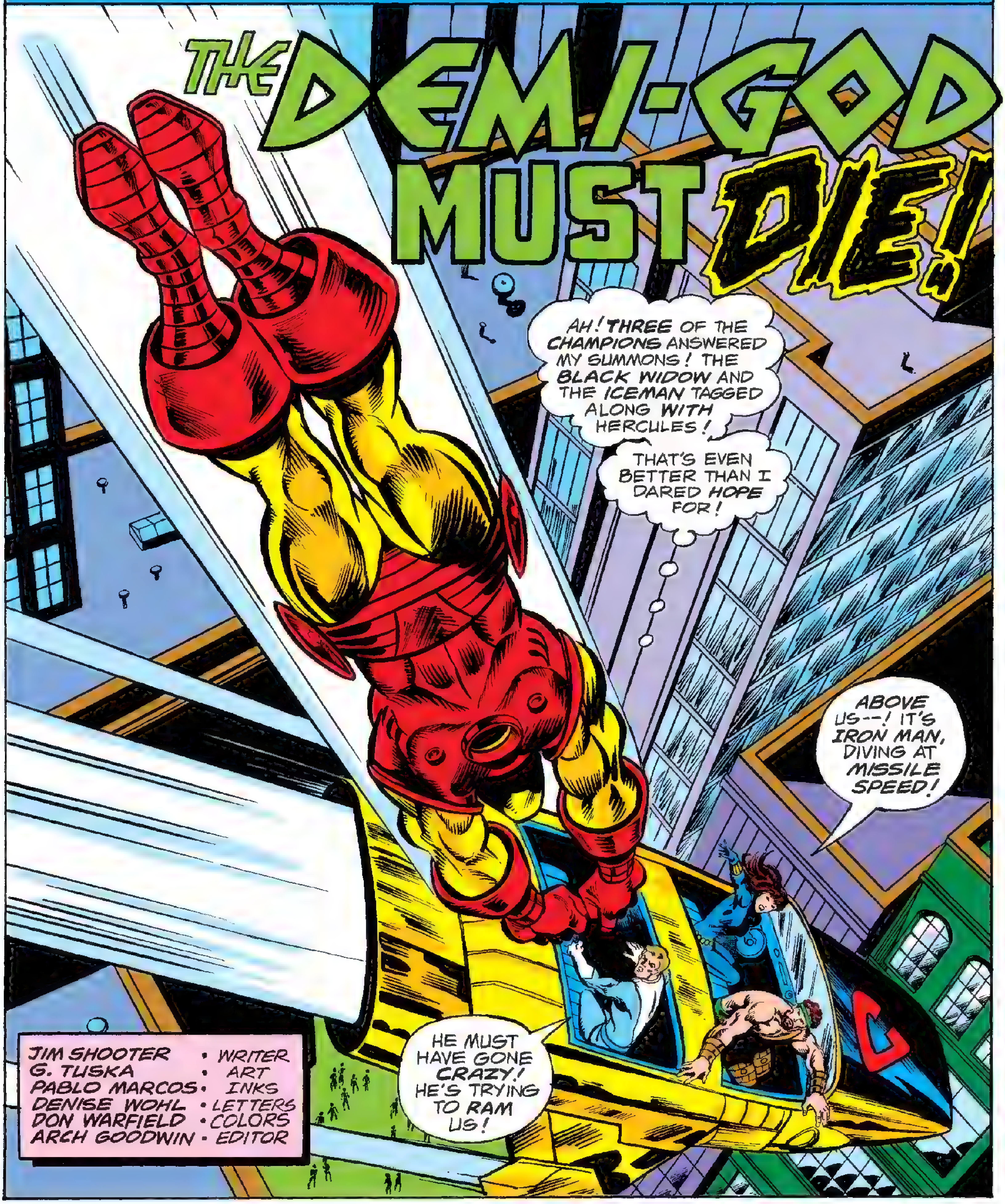
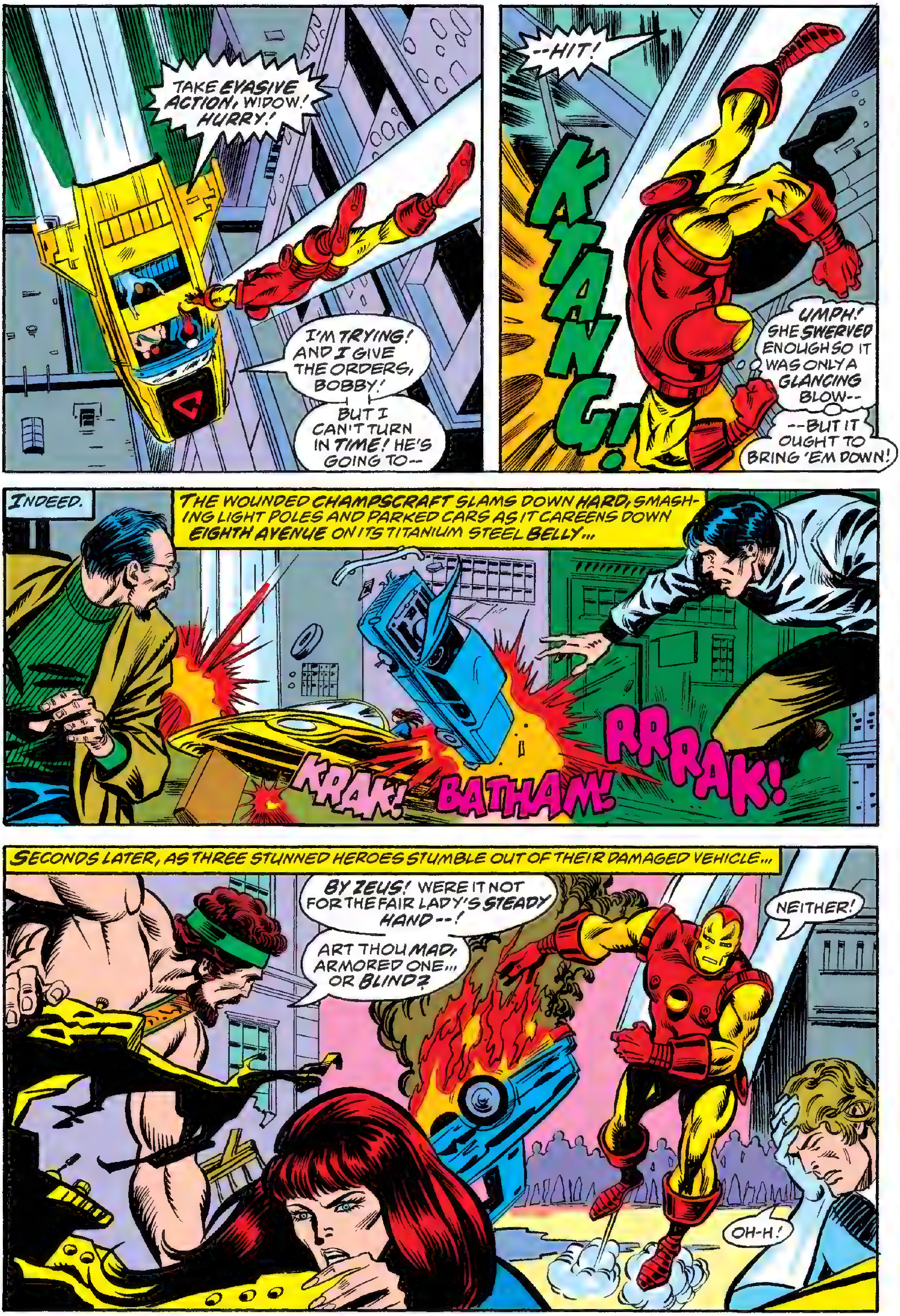
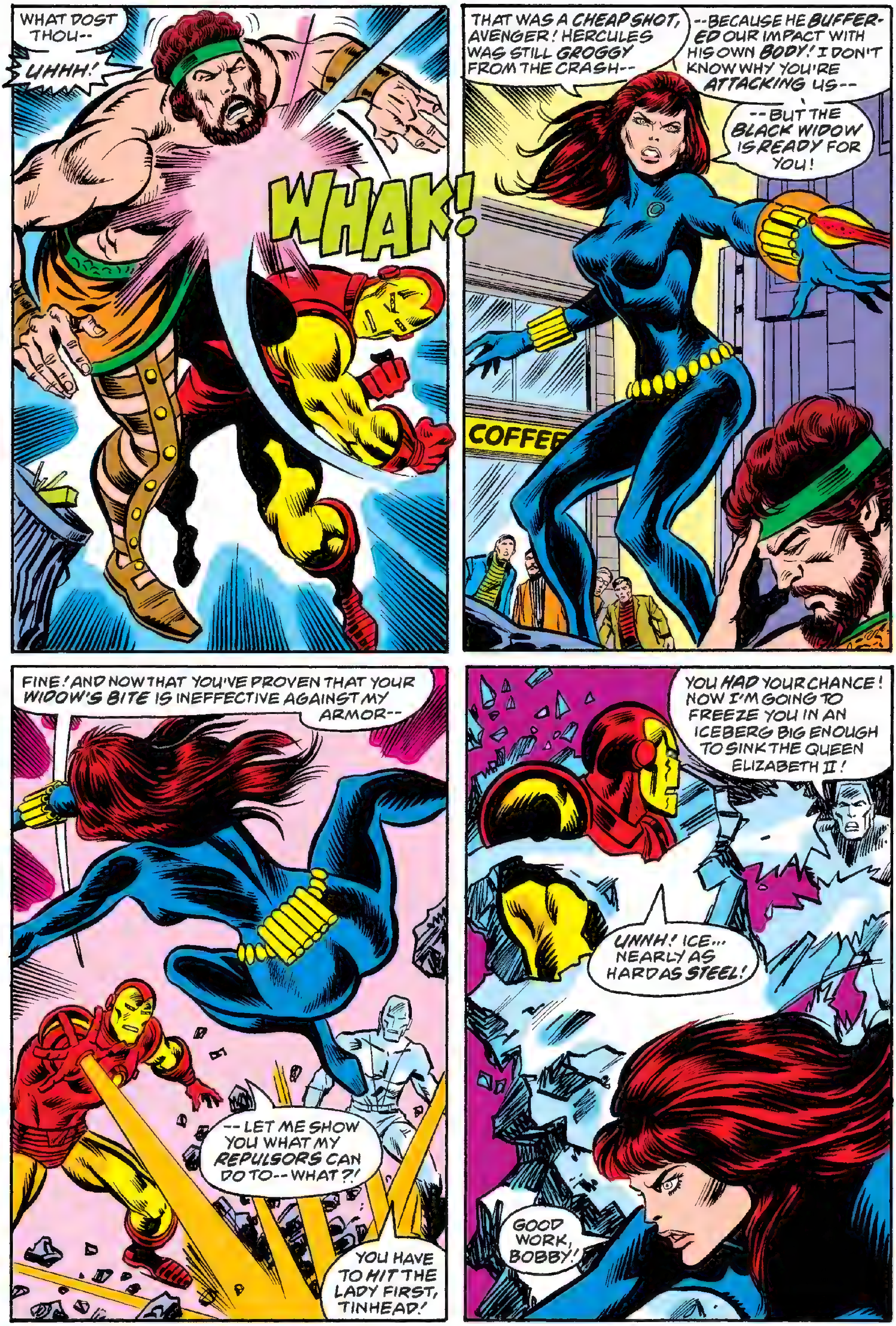
©1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES!
the AVENGERS ®
TM
DON'T DO IT, SHELLHEAD! STOP!
NO!
I'M GOING TO KILL HERCULES AND HIS FELLOW CHAMPIONS--OR DIE TRYING!
DO NOT ...TTER
GEORGE PEREZ / PABLO MARCOS

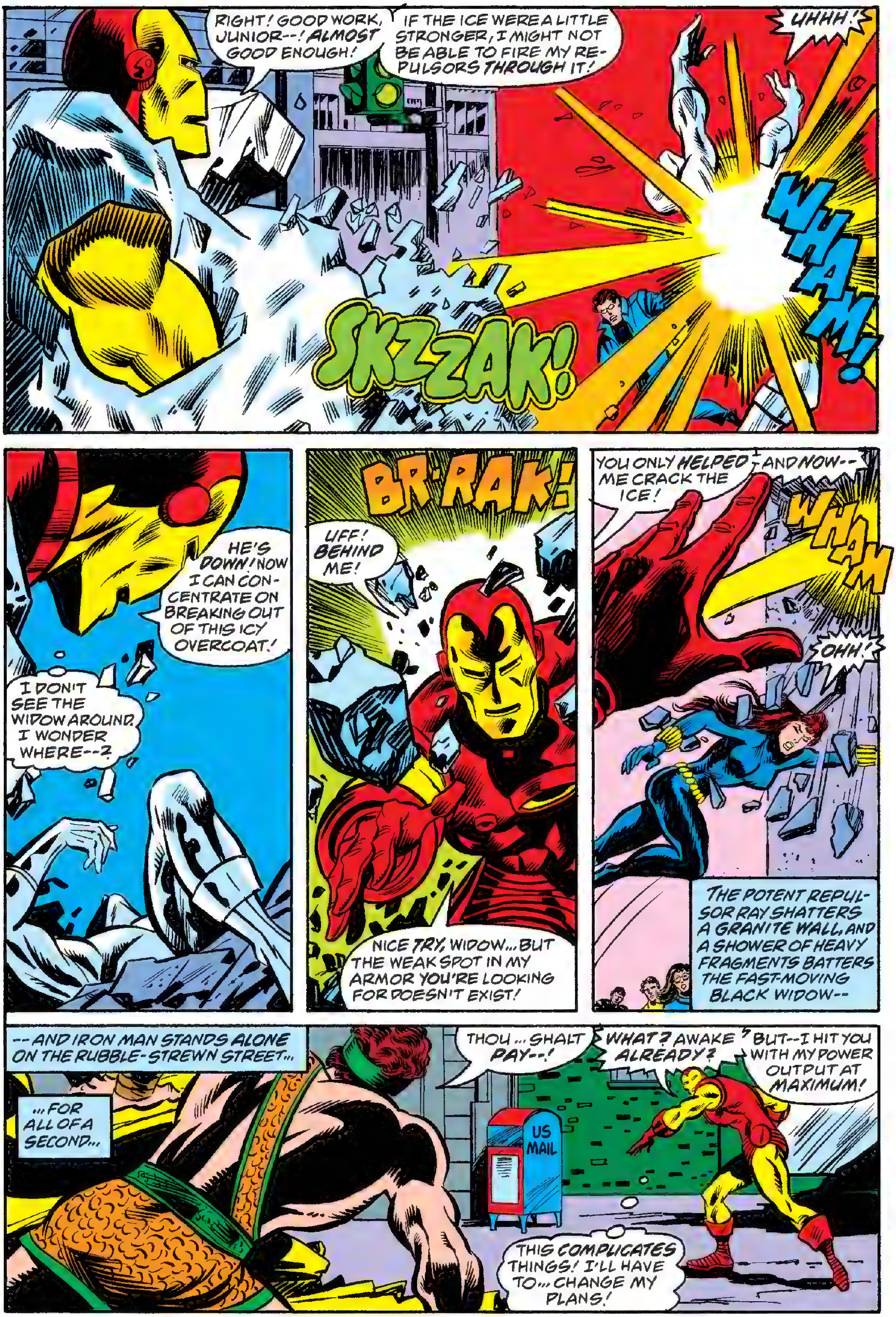
And there came a day when *Earth's mightiest heroes* found themselves *united* against a common threat. On that day, the *Avengers* were born—to fight the foes no *single* super-hero could withstand!

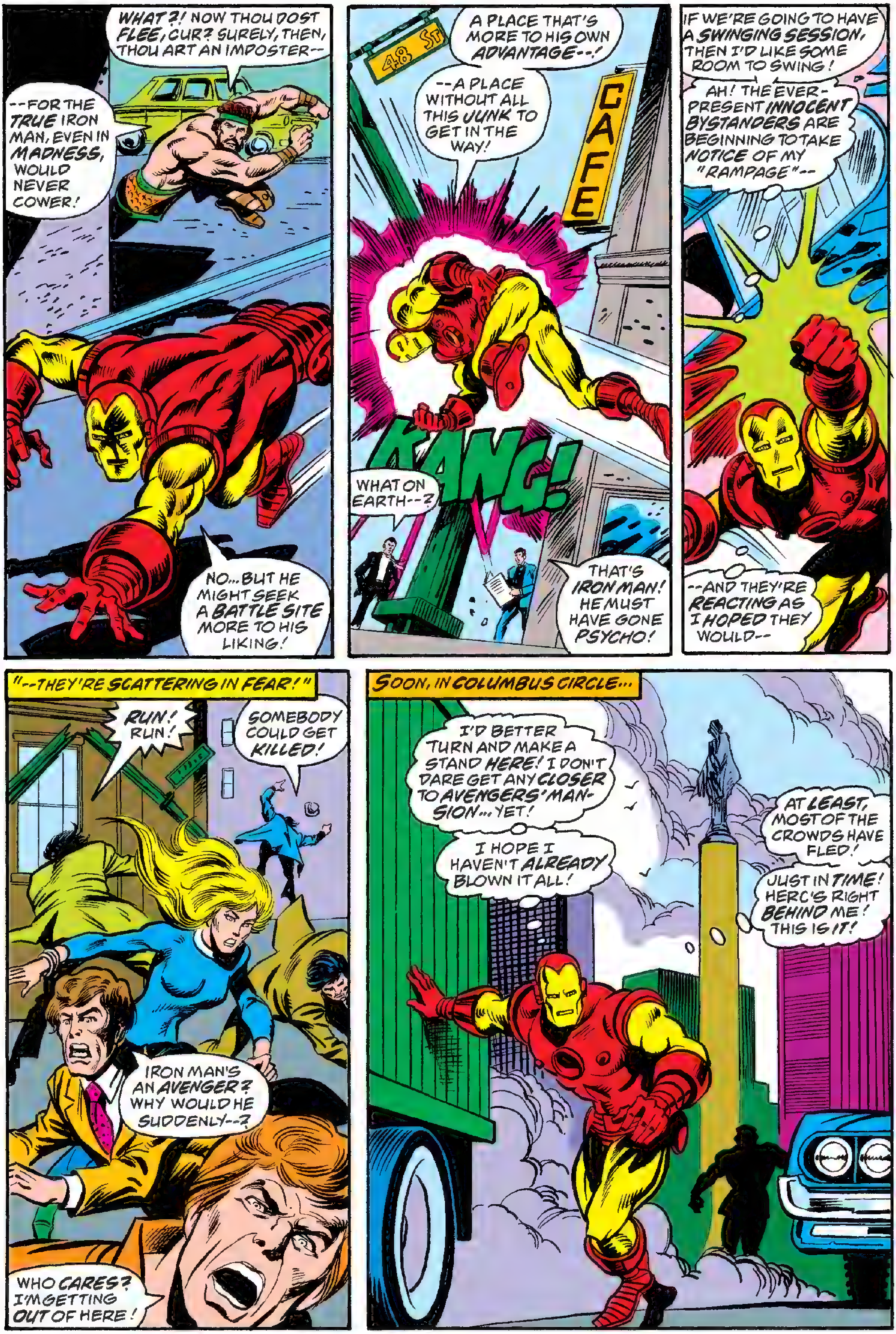
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!®

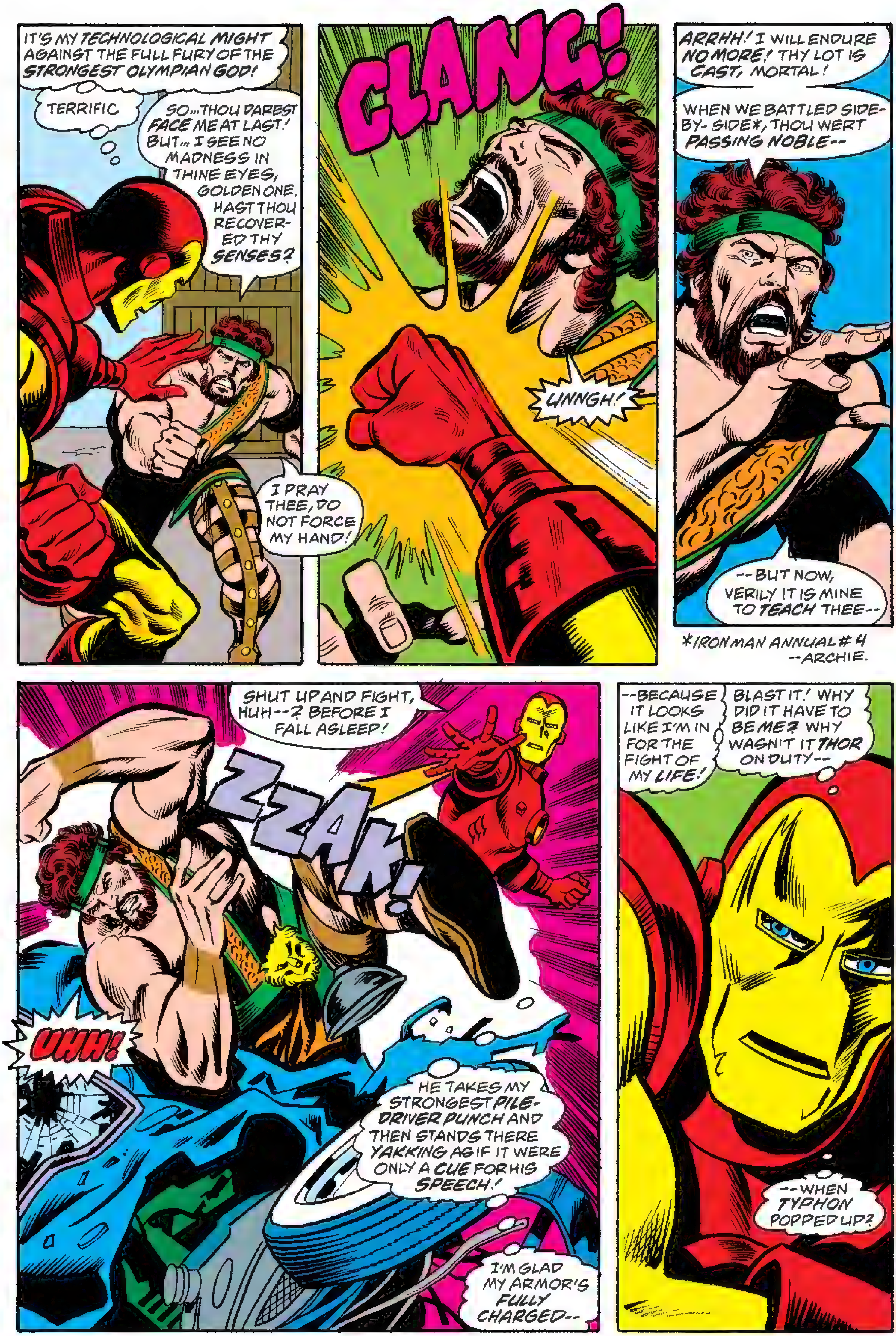

THE DEMI-GOD MUST DIE!
AH! THREE OF THE CHAMPIONS ANSWERED MY SUMMONS! THE BLACK WIDOW AND THE ICEMAN TAGGED ALONG WITH HERCULES!
THAT'S EVEN BETTER THAN I DARED HOPE FOR!
ABOVE US--! IT'S IRON MAN, DIVING AT MISSILE SPEED!
HE MUST HAVE GONE CRAZY! HE'S TRYING TO RAM US!
JIM SHOOTER • WRITER
G. TUSKA • ART
PABLO MARCOS • INKS
DENISE WOHL • LETTERS
DON WARFIELD • COLORS
ARCH GOODWIN • EDITOR

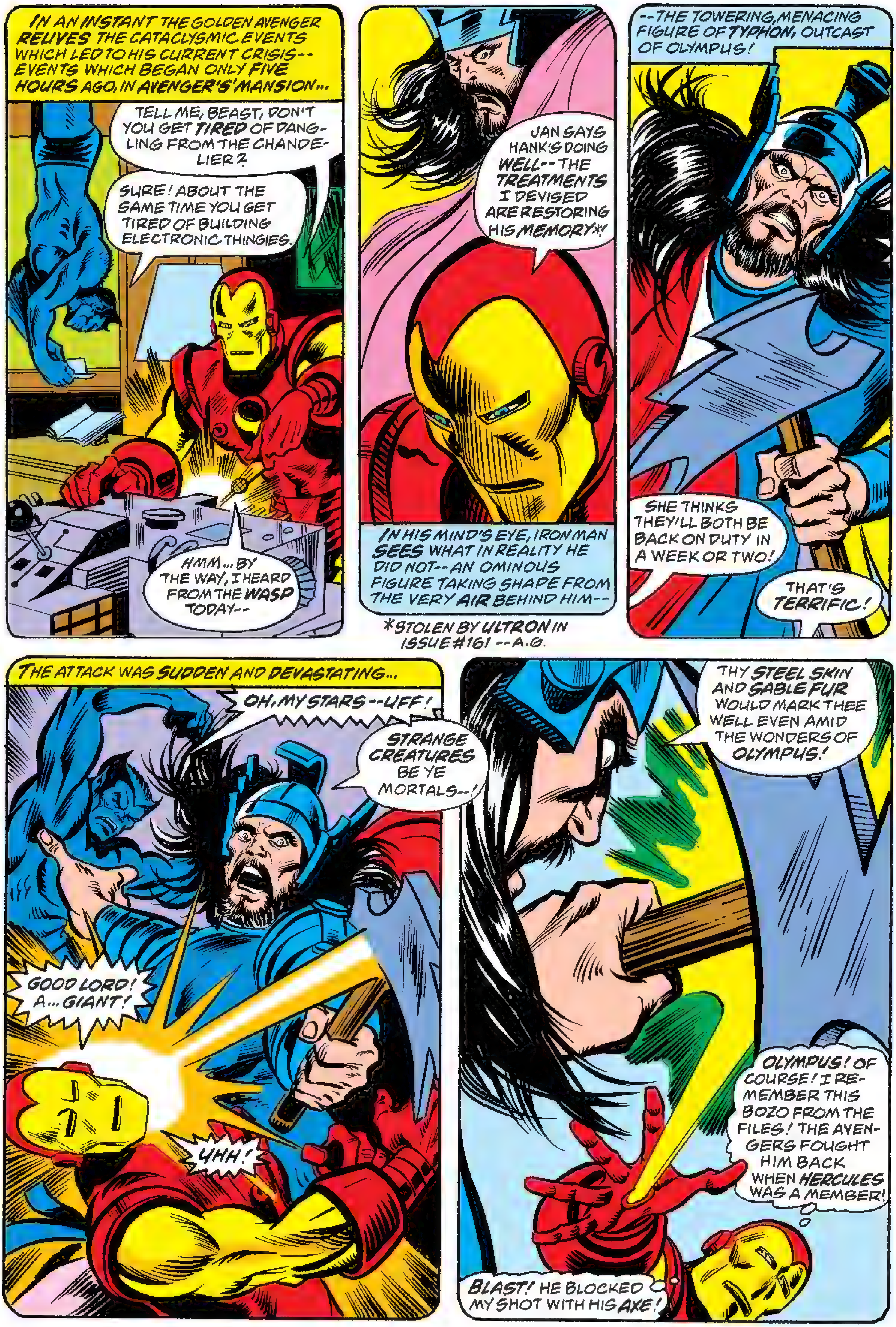

TAKE EVASIVE ACTION, WIDOW! HURRY!
I'M TRYING! AND I GIVE THE ORDERS, BOBBY!
BUT I CAN'T TURN IN TIME! HE'S GOING TO--
--HIT!
KTANG!
UMPH! SHE SWERVED ENOUGH SO IT WAS ONLY A GLANCING BLOW--
--BUT IT OUGHT TO BRING 'EM DOWN!
INDEED.
THE WOUNDED CHAMPSCRAFT SLAMS DOWN HARD, SMASHING LIGHT POLES AND PARKED CARS AS IT CAREENS DOWN EIGHTH AVENUE ON ITS TITANIUM STEEL BELLY...
KRAK!
BATHAM!
RRRAK!
SECONDS LATER, AS THREE STUNNED HEROES STUMBLE OUT OF THEIR DAMAGED VEHICLE...
BY ZEUS! WERE IT NOT FOR THE FAIR LADY'S STEADY HAND--!
ART THOU MAD, ARMORED ONE... OR BLIND?
NEITHER!
OH-H!

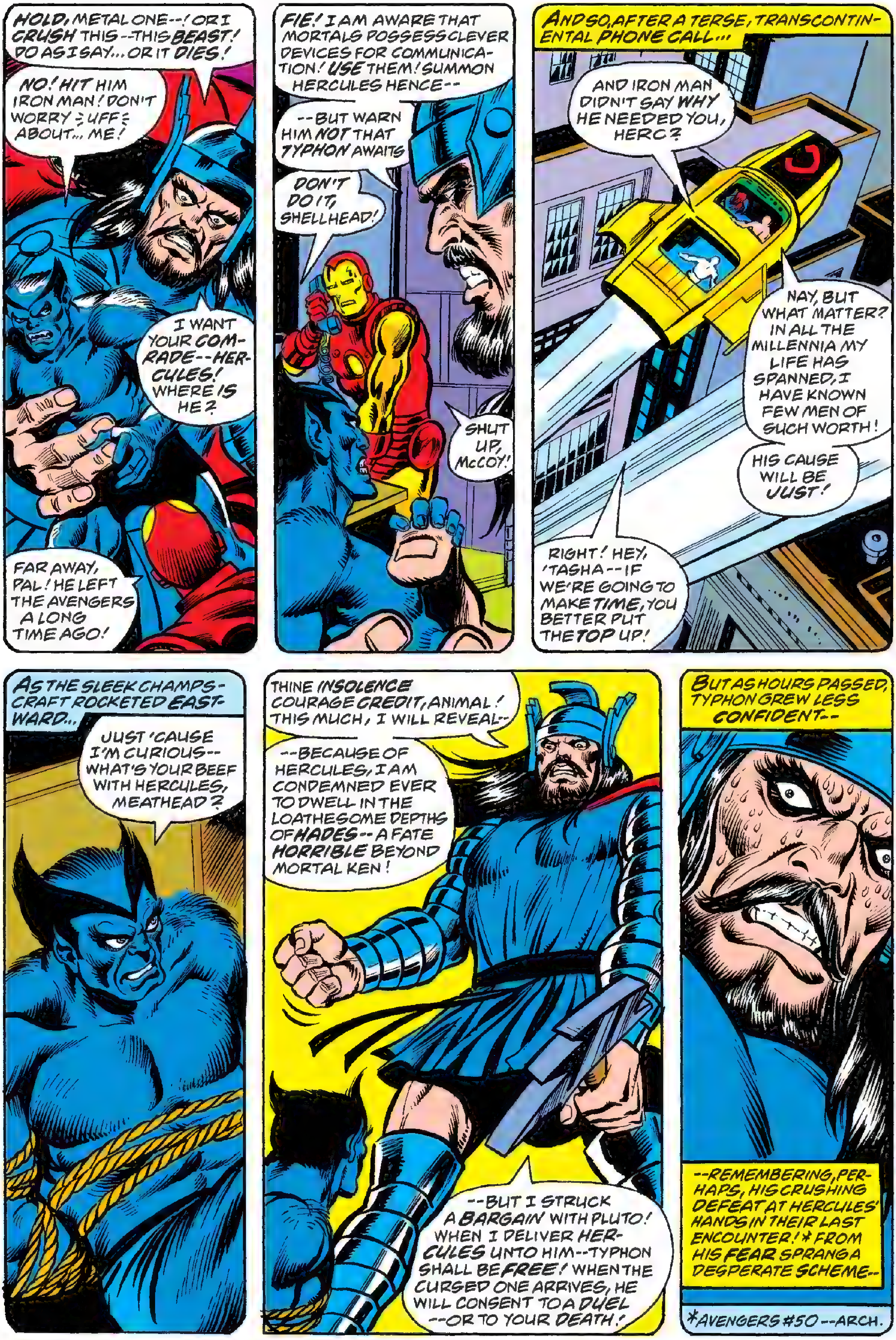

WHAT DOST THOU--
UHHH!
WHAK!
THAT WAS A CHEAP SHOT, AVENGER! HERCULES WAS STILL GROGGY FROM THE CRASH--
--BECAUSE HE BUFFERED OUR IMPACT WITH HIS OWN BODY! I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE ATTACKING US--
--BUT THE BLACK WIDOW IS READY FOR YOU!
COFFEE
FINE! AND NOW THAT YOU'VE PROVEN THAT YOUR WIDOW'S BITE IS INEFFECTIVE AGAINST MY ARMOR--
--LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT MY REPULSORS CAN DO TO-- WHAT?!
YOU HAVE TO HIT THE LADY FIRST, TINHEAD!
YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE! NOW I'M GOING TO FREEZE YOU IN AN ICEBERG BIG ENOUGH TO SINK THE QUEEN ELIZABETH II!
UNNH! ICE... NEARLY AS HARD AS STEEL!
GOOD WORK, BOBBY!

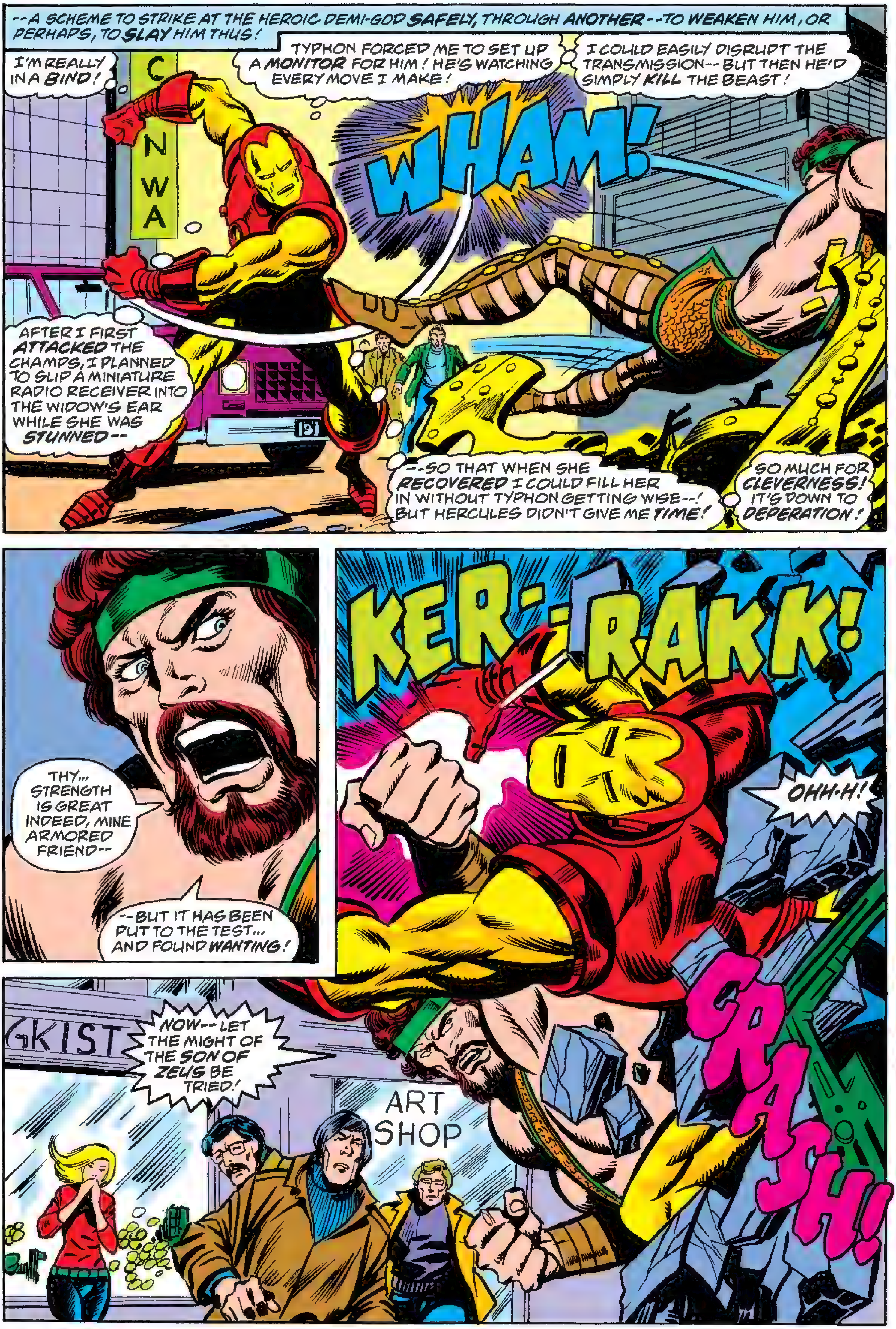

RIGHT! GOOD WORK, JUNIOR--! ALMOST GOOD ENOUGH!
IF THE ICE WERE A LITTLE STRONGER, I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO FIRE MY REPULSORS THROUGH IT!
UHHH!
WHAM!
SKZZAK!
HE'S DOWN! NOW I CAN CONCENTRATE ON BREAKING OUT OF THIS ICY OVERCOAT!
I DON'T SEE THE WIDOW AROUND. I WONDER WHERE--?
BR-RAK!
UFF! BEHIND ME!
NICE TRY, WIDOW... BUT THE WEAK SPOT IN MY ARMOR YOU'RE LOOKING FOR DOESN'T EXIST!
YOU ONLY HELPED ME CRACK THE ICE!
AND NOW--
WHAM
OHH!
THE POTENT REPULSOR RAY SHATTERS A GRANITE WALL, AND A SHOWER OF HEAVY FRAGMENTS BATTERS THE FAST-MOVING BLACK WIDOW--
--AND IRON MAN STANDS ALONE ON THE RUBBLE-STREWN STREET...
...FOR ALL OF A SECOND...
THOU... SHALT PAY--!
WHAT? AWAKE ALREADY?
BUT--I HIT YOU WITH MY POWER OUTPUT AT MAXIMUM!
US MAIL
THIS COMPLICATES THINGS! I'LL HAVE TO... CHANGE MY PLANS!

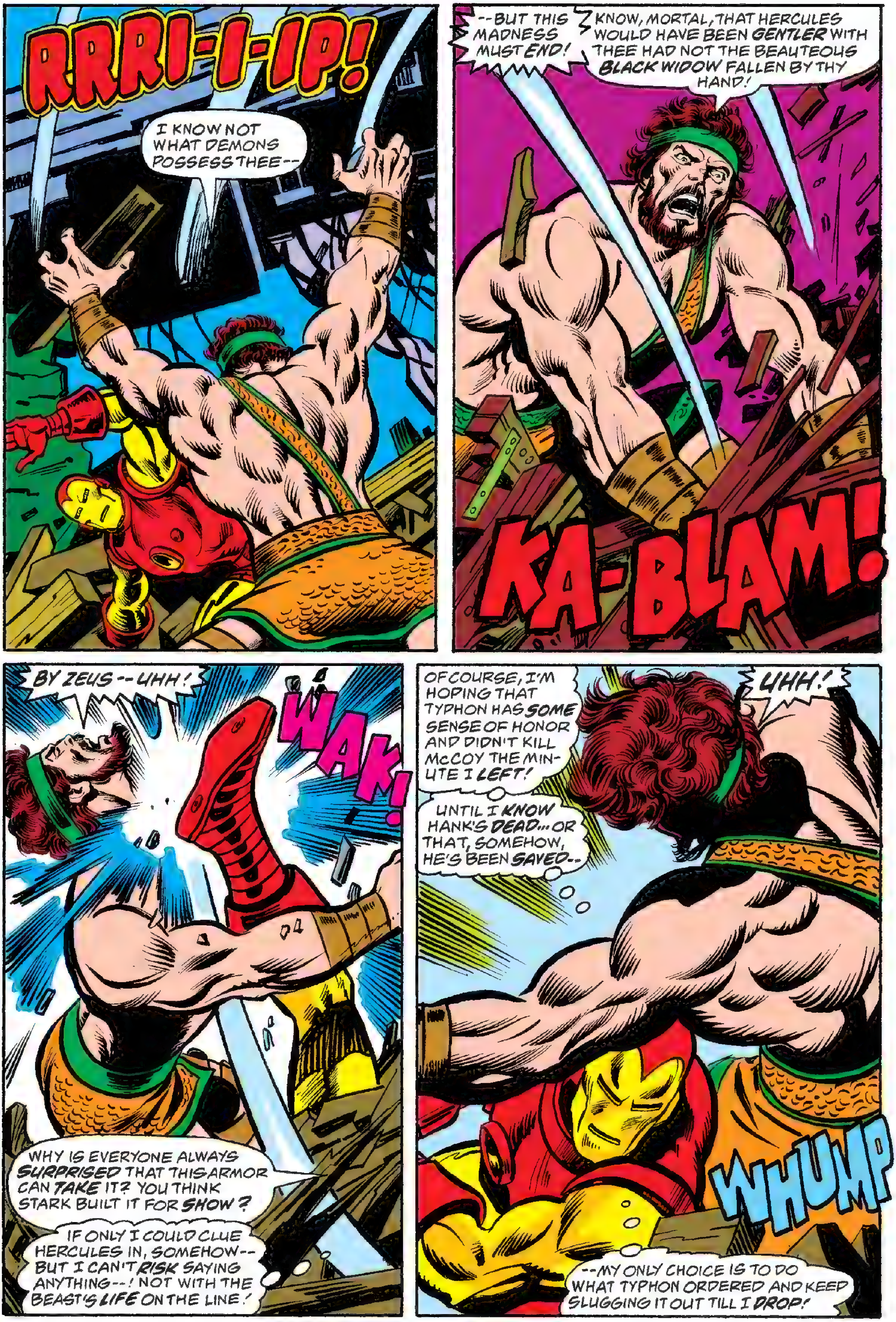

WHAT?! NOW THOU DOST FLEE, CUR? SURELY, THEN, THOU ART AN IMPOSTER--
--FOR THE TRUE IRON MAN, EVEN IN MADNESS, WOULD NEVER COWER!
NO...BUT HE MIGHT SEEK A BATTLE SITE MORE TO HIS LIKING!
48 St
A PLACE THAT'S MORE TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE--!
--A PLACE WITHOUT ALL THIS JUNK TO GET IN THE WAY!
CAFE
KANG!
WHAT ON EARTH--?
THAT'S IRON MAN! HE MUST HAVE GONE PSYCHO!
IF WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A SWINGING SESSION, THEN I'D LIKE SOME ROOM TO SWING!
AH! THE EVER-PRESENT INNOCENT BYSTANDERS ARE BEGINNING TO TAKE NOTICE OF MY "RAMPAGE"--
--AND THEY'RE REACTING AS I HOPED THEY WOULD--
"--THEY'RE SCATTERING IN FEAR!"
RUN! RUN!
SOMEBODY COULD GET KILLED!
IRON MAN'S AN AVENGER? WHY WOULD HE SUDDENLY--?
WHO CARES? I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE!
SOON, IN COLUMBUS CIRCLE...
I'D BETTER TURN AND MAKE A STAND HERE! I DON'T DARE GET ANY CLOSER TO AVENGERS' MANSION...YET!
I HOPE I HAVEN'T ALREADY BLOWN IT ALL!
AT LEAST, MOST OF THE CROWDS HAVE FLED!
JUST IN TIME! HERC'S RIGHT BEHIND ME! THIS IS IT!

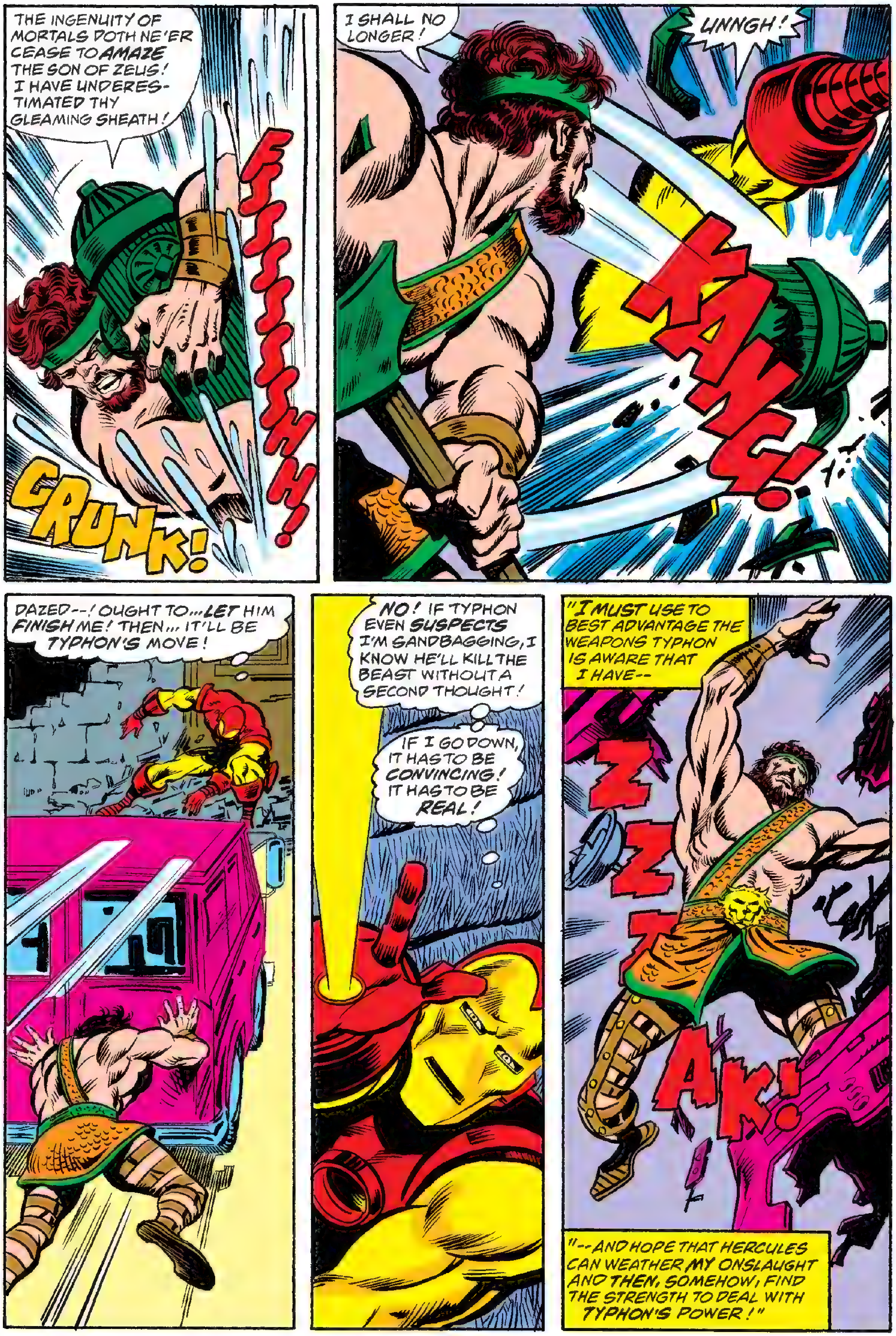

IT'S MY TECHNOLOGICAL MIGHT AGAINST THE FULL FURY OF THE STRONGEST OLYMPIAN GOD!
TERRIFIC
SO...THOU DAREST FACE ME AT LAST! BUT... I SEE NO MADNESS IN THINE EYES, GOLDEN ONE. HAST THOU RECOVERED THY SENSES?
I PRAY THEE, DO NOT FORCE MY HAND!
CLANG!
UNNGH!
ARRHH! I WILL ENDURE NO MORE! THY LOT IS CAST, MORTAL!
WHEN WE BATTLED SIDE-BY-SIDE*, THOU WERT PASSING NOBLE--
--BUT NOW, VERILY IT IS MINE TO TEACH THEE--
*IRON MAN ANNUAL #4 --ARCHIE.
SHUT UP AND FIGHT, HUH--? BEFORE I FALL ASLEEP!
ZZAK!
UHH!
HE TAKES MY STRONGEST PILE-DRIVER PUNCH AND THEN STANDS THERE YAKKING AS IF IT WERE ONLY A CUE FOR HIS SPEECH!
I'M GLAD MY ARMOR'S FULLY CHARGED--
--BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE I'M IN FOR THE FIGHT OF MY LIFE!
BLAST IT! WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE ME? WHY WASN'T IT THOR ON DUTY--
--WHEN TYPHON POPPED UP?

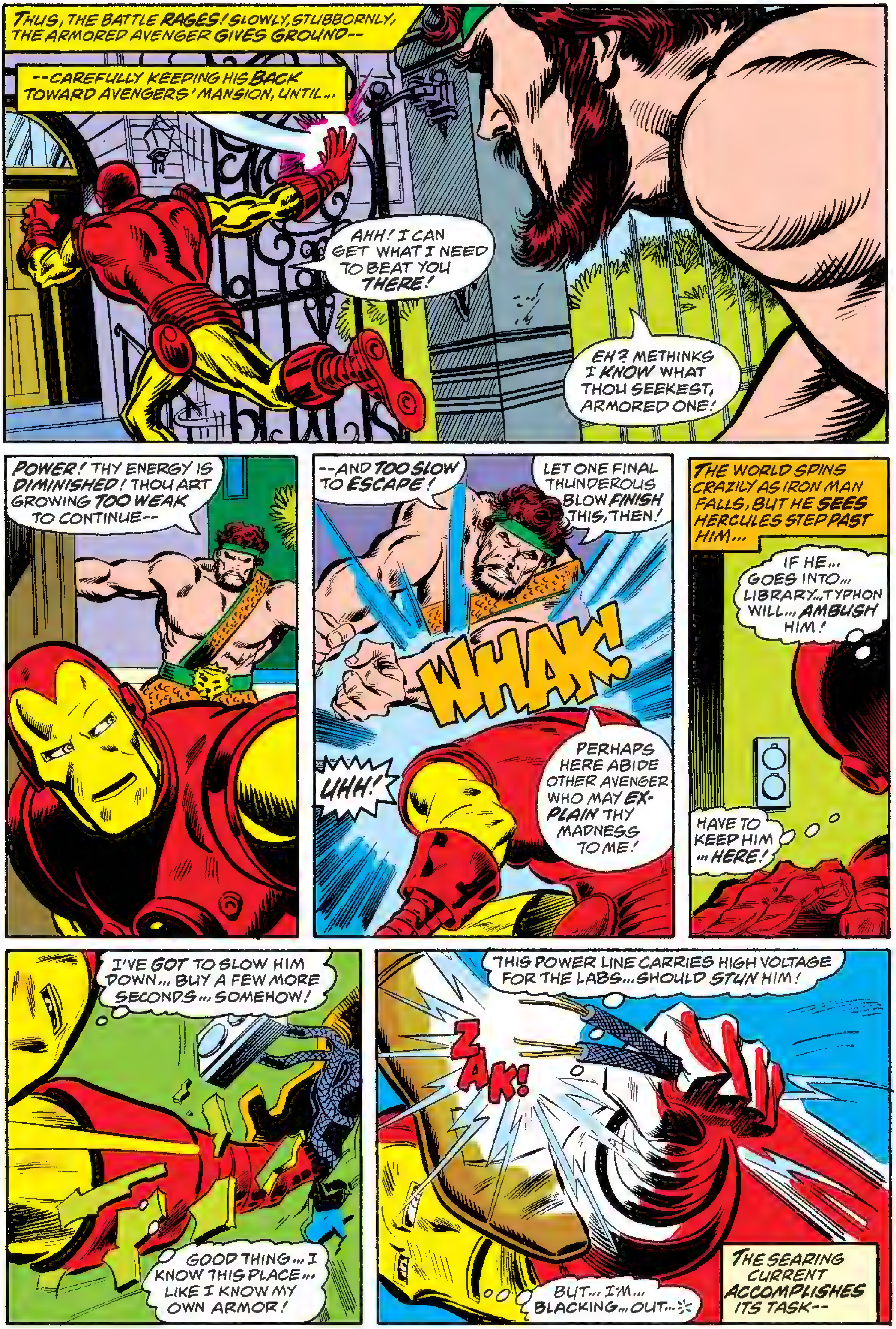

IN AN INSTANT THE GOLDEN AVENGER RELIVES THE CATACLYSMIC EVENTS WHICH LED TO HIS CURRENT CRISIS-- EVENTS WHICH BEGAN ONLY FIVE HOURS AGO, IN AVENGER'S' MANSION...
TELL ME, BEAST, DON'T YOU GET TIRED OF DANGLING FROM THE CHANDELIER?
SURE! ABOUT THE SAME TIME YOU GET TIRED OF BUILDING ELECTRONIC THINGIES.
HMM... BY THE WAY, I HEARD FROM THE WASP TODAY--
JAN SAYS HANK'S DOING WELL-- THE TREATMENTS I DEVISED ARE RESTORING HIS MEMORY*!
IN HIS MIND'S EYE, IRON MAN SEES WHAT IN REALITY HE DID NOT-- AN OMINOUS FIGURE TAKING SHAPE FROM THE VERY AIR BEHIND HIM--
*STOLEN BY ULTRON IN ISSUE #161 --A.G.
--THE TOWERING, MENACING FIGURE OF TYPHON, OUTCAST OF OLYMPUS!
SHE THINKS THEY'LL BOTH BE BACK ON DUTY IN A WEEK OR TWO!
THAT'S TERRIFIC!
THE ATTACK WAS SUDDEN AND DEVASTATING...
OH, MY STARS--UFF!
STRANGE CREATURES BE YE MORTALS--!
GOOD LORD! A...GIANT!
UHH!
THY STEEL SKIN AND SABLE FUR WOULD MARK THEE WELL EVEN AMID THE WONDERS OF OLYMPUS!
OLYMPUS! OF COURSE! I REMEMBER THIS BOZO FROM THE FILES! THE AVENGERS FOUGHT HIM BACK WHEN HERCULES WAS A MEMBER!
BLAST! HE BLOCKED MY SHOT WITH HIS AXE!

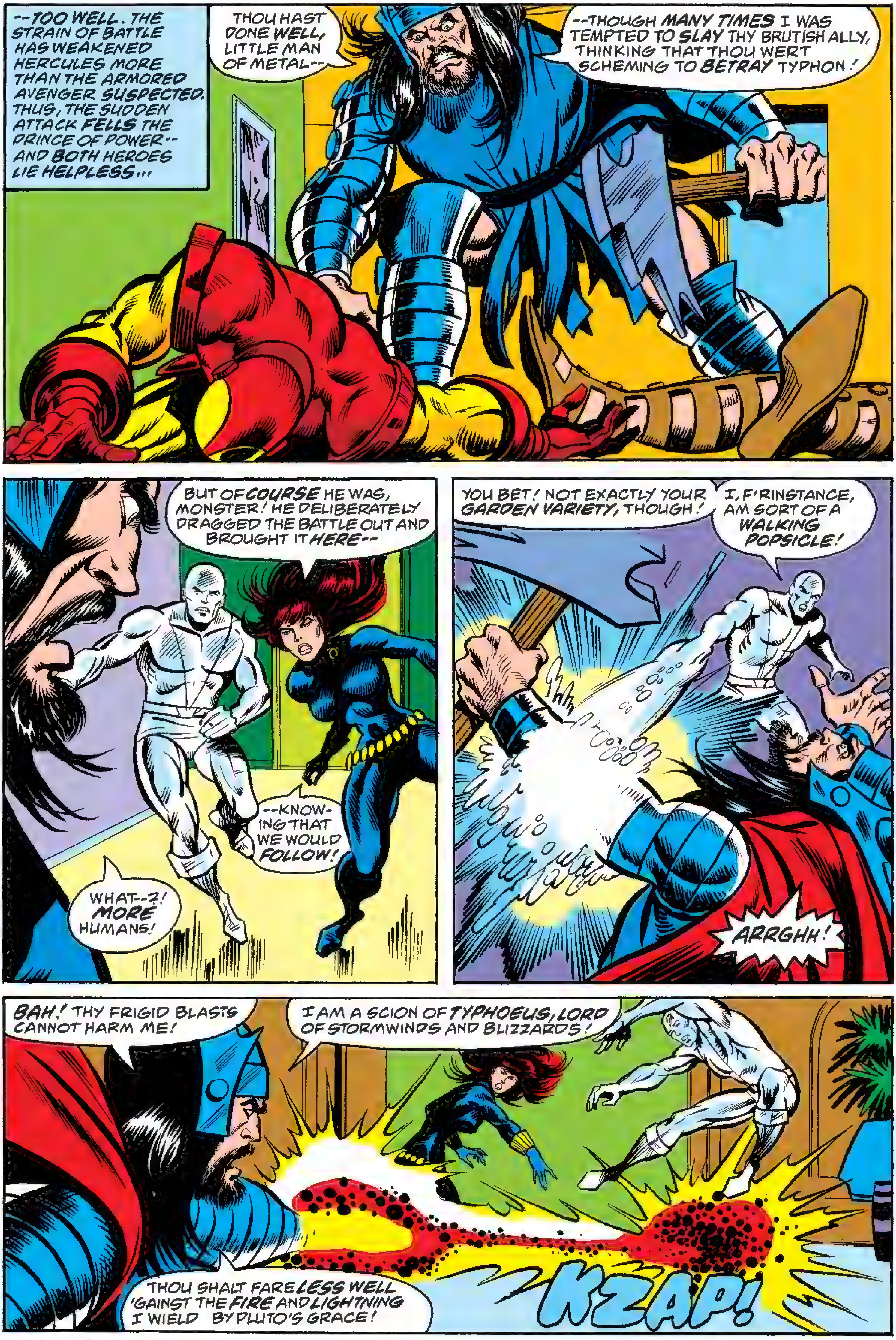

HOLD, METAL ONE--! OR I CRUSH THIS--THIS BEAST! DO AS I SAY... OR IT DIES!
NO! HIT HIM IRON MAN! DON'T WORRY -UFF- ABOUT... ME!
I WANT YOUR COMRADE--HERCULES! WHERE IS HE?
FAR AWAY, PAL! HE LEFT THE AVENGERS A LONG TIME AGO!
FIE! I AM AWARE THAT MORTALS POSSESS CLEVER DEVICES FOR COMMUNICATION! USE THEM! SUMMON HERCULES HENCE--
--BUT WARN HIM NOT THAT TYPHON AWAITS
DON'T DO IT, SHELLHEAD!
SHUT UP, McCOY!
AND SO, AFTER A TERSE, TRANSCONTINENTAL PHONE CALL...
AND IRON MAN DIDN'T SAY WHY HE NEEDED YOU, HERC?
NAY, BUT WHAT MATTER? IN ALL THE MILLENNIA MY LIFE HAS SPANNED, I HAVE KNOWN FEW MEN OF SUCH WORTH!
HIS CAUSE WILL BE JUST!
RIGHT! HEY, 'TASHA--IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE TIME, YOU BETTER PUT THE TOP UP!
AS THE SLEEK CHAMPS-CRAFT ROCKETED EASTWARD...
JUST 'CAUSE I'M CURIOUS--WHAT'S YOUR BEEF WITH HERCULES, MEATHEAD?
THINE INSOLENCE COURAGE CREDIT, ANIMAL! THIS MUCH, I WILL REVEAL--
--BECAUSE OF HERCULES, I AM CONDEMNED EVER TO DWELL IN THE LOATHESOME DEPTHS OF HADES--A FATE HORRIBLE BEYOND MORTAL KEN!
--BUT I STRUCK A BARGAIN WITH PLUTO! WHEN I DELIVER HERCULES UNTO HIM--TYPHON SHALL BE FREE! WHEN THE CURSED ONE ARRIVES, HE WILL CONSENT TO A DUEL --OR TO YOUR DEATH!
BUT AS HOURS PASSED, TYPHON GREW LESS CONFIDENT--
--REMEMBERING, PERHAPS, HIS CRUSHING DEFEAT AT HERCULES' HANDS IN THEIR LAST ENCOUNTER!* FROM HIS FEAR SPRANG A DESPERATE SCHEME--
*AVENGERS #50 --ARCH.

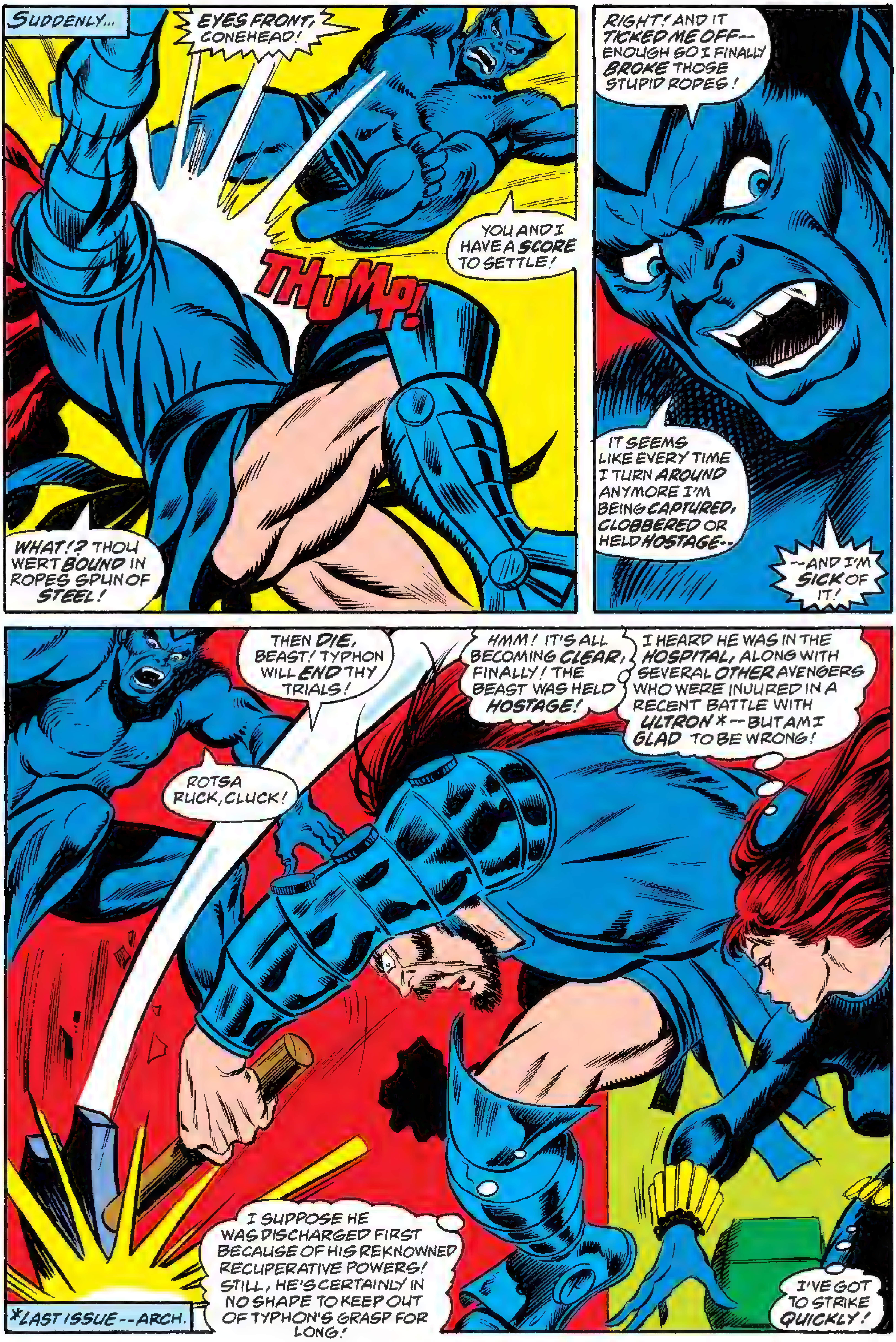

--A SCHEME TO STRIKE AT THE HEROIC DEMI-GOD **SAFELY**, THROUGH **ANOTHER**--TO **WEAKEN** HIM, OR PERHAPS, TO **SLAY** HIM THUS!
I'M REALLY IN A **BIND**!
TYPHON FORCED ME TO SET UP A **MONITOR** FOR HIM! HE'S WATCHING EVERY MOVE I MAKE!
I COULD EASILY DISRUPT THE TRANSMISSION--BUT THEN HE'D SIMPLY **KILL** THE BEAST!
C N WA
WHAM!
AFTER I FIRST **ATTACKED** THE CHAMPS, I PLANNED TO SLIP A MINIATURE RADIO RECEIVER INTO THE WIDOW'S EAR WHILE SHE WAS **STUNNED**--
191
--SO THAT WHEN SHE **RECOVERED** I COULD FILL HER IN WITHOUT TYPHON GETTING WISE--! BUT HERCULES DIDN'T GIVE ME **TIME**!
SO MUCH FOR **CLEVERNESS**! IT'S DOWN TO **DEPERATION**!
THY... STRENGTH IS GREAT INDEED, MINE ARMORED FRIEND--
--BUT IT HAS BEEN PUT TO THE TEST... AND FOUND **WANTING**!
KER-RAKK!
OHH-H!
GKIST
NOW-- LET THE MIGHT OF THE **SON OF ZEUS** BE TRIED!
ART SHOP
CRASH!!

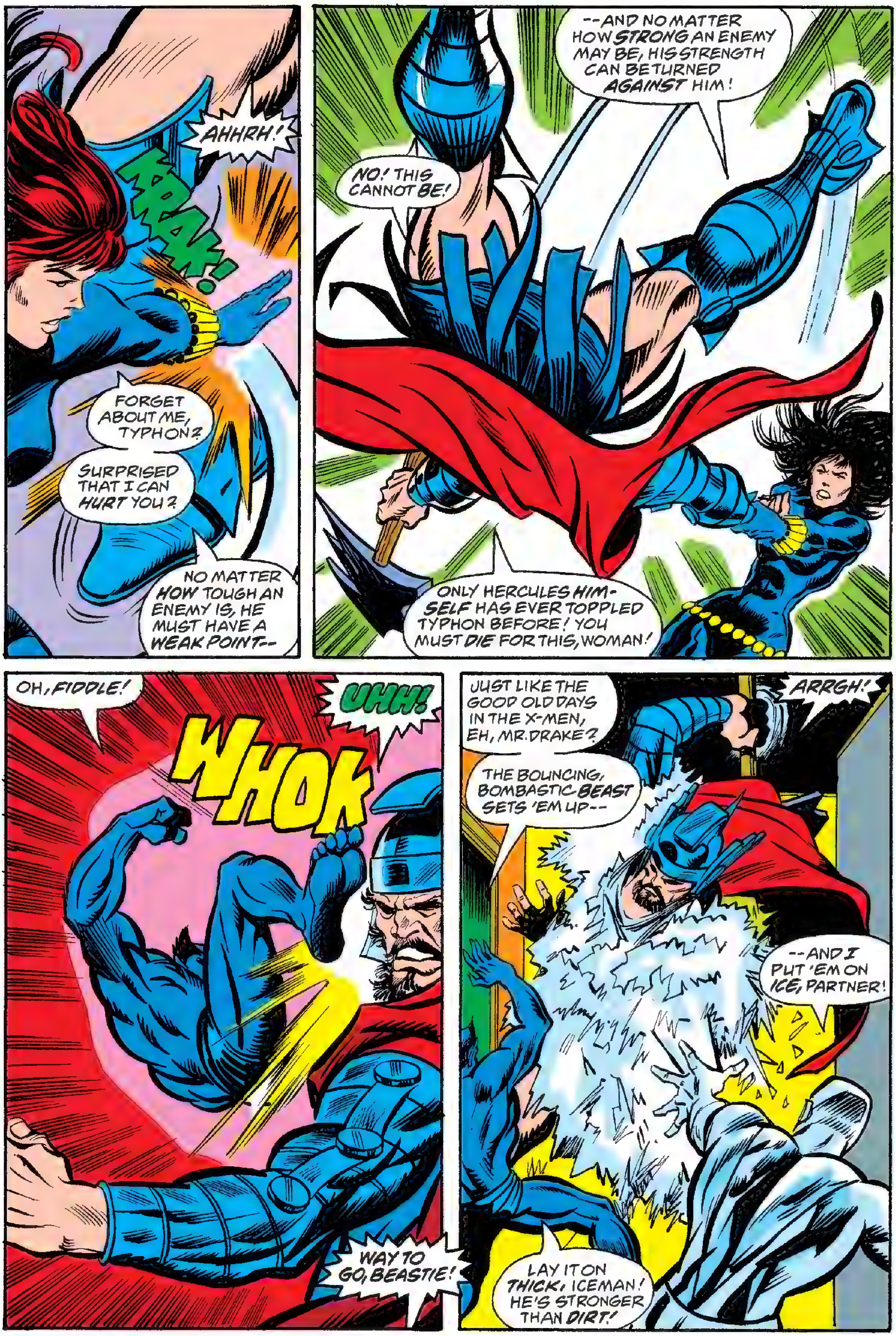

RRRI-I-IP!
I KNOW NOT WHAT DEMONS POSSESS THEE--
--BUT THIS MADNESS MUST *END!*
KNOW, MORTAL, THAT HERCULES WOULD HAVE BEEN *GENTLER* WITH THEE HAD NOT THE BEAUTEOUS *BLACK WIDOW* FALLEN BY THY HAND!
KA-BLAM!
BY ZEUS--UHH!
WAK!
WHY IS EVERYONE ALWAYS *SURPRISED* THAT THIS ARMOR CAN *TAKE* IT? YOU THINK STARK BUILT IT FOR *SHOW*?
IF ONLY I COULD CLUE HERCULES IN, SOMEHOW--BUT I CAN'T *RISK* SAYING ANYTHING--! NOT WITH THE BEAST'S *LIFE* ON THE LINE!
OF COURSE, I'M HOPING THAT TYPHON HAS *SOME* SENSE OF HONOR AND DIDN'T KILL McCOY THE MINUTE I *LEFT!*
UHH!
UNTIL I *KNOW* HANK'S *DEAD*... OR THAT, SOMEHOW, HE'S BEEN *SAVED*--
WHUMP
--MY ONLY CHOICE IS TO DO WHAT TYPHON ORDERED AND KEEP SLUGGING IT OUT TILL I *DROP!*

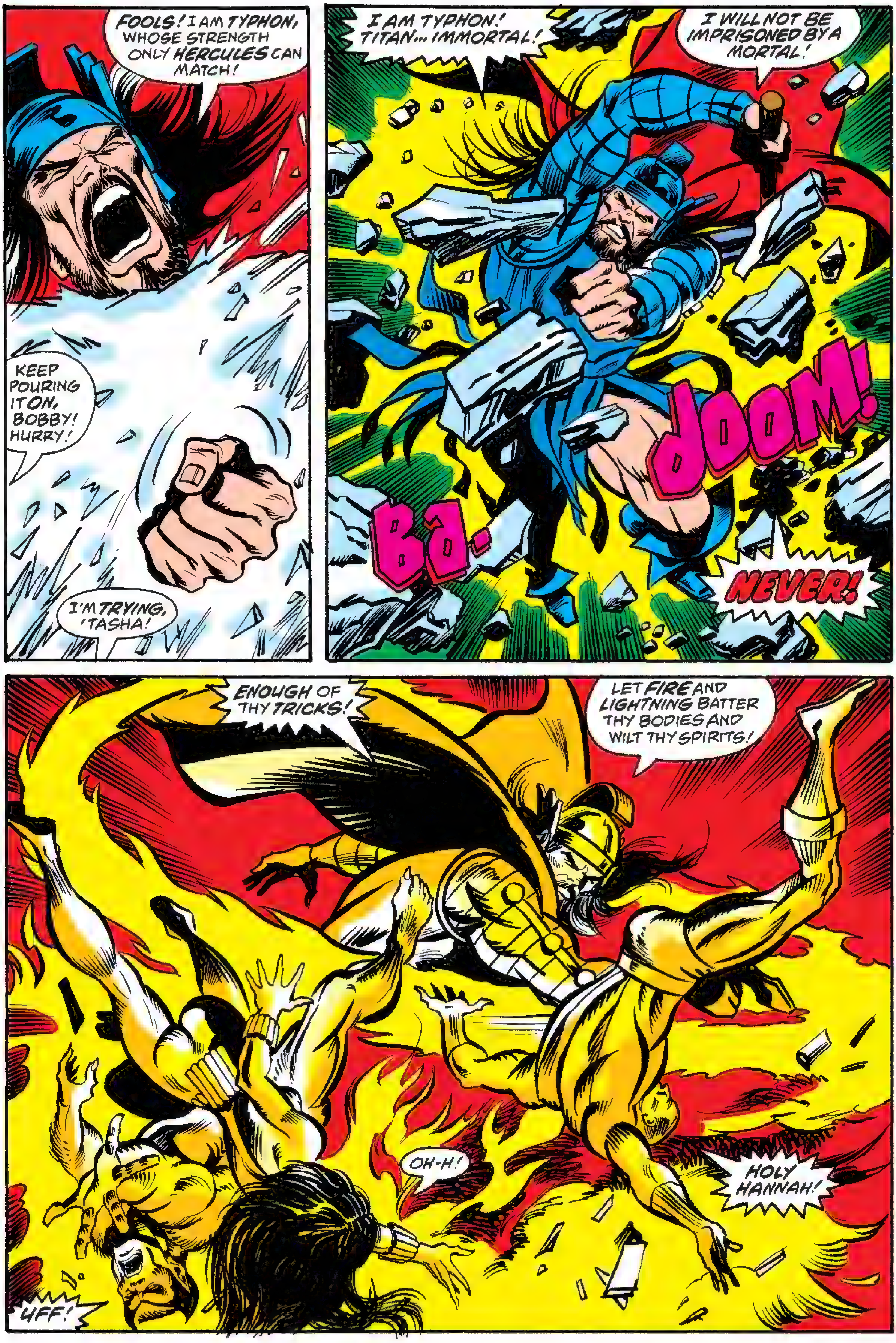

THE INGENUITY OF MORTALS DOTH NE'ER CEASE TO AMAZE THE SON OF ZEUS! I HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THY GLEAMING SHEATH!
FSSSSSHHH!
CRUNK!
I SHALL NO LONGER!
UNNGH!
KANG!
DAZED--! OUGHT TO...LET HIM FINISH ME! THEN... IT'LL BE TYPHON'S MOVE!
NO! IF TYPHON EVEN SUSPECTS I'M SANDBAGGING, I KNOW HE'LL KILL THE BEAST WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT!
IF I GO DOWN, IT HAS TO BE CONVINCING! IT HAS TO BE REAL!
"I MUST USE TO BEST ADVANTAGE THE WEAPONS TYPHON IS AWARE THAT I HAVE--
ZZZTAK!
"--AND HOPE THAT HERCULES CAN WEATHER MY ONSLAUGHT AND THEN, SOMEHOW, FIND THE STRENGTH TO DEAL WITH TYPHON'S POWER!"

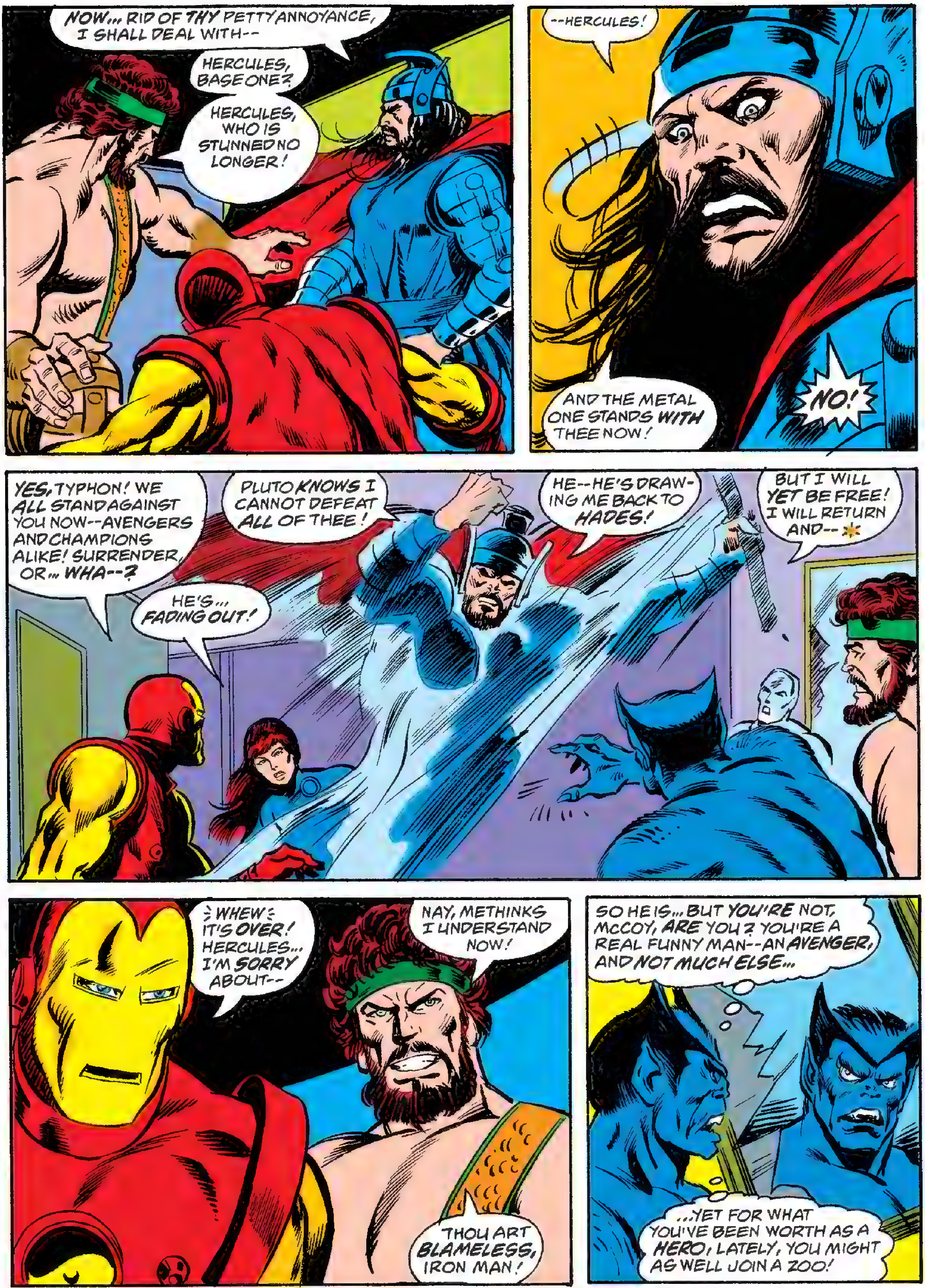

THUS, THE BATTLE RAGES! SLOWLY, STUBBORNLY, THE ARMORED AVENGER GIVES GROUND--
--CAREFULLY KEEPING HIS BACK TOWARD AVENGERS' MANSION, UNTIL...
AHH! I CAN GET WHAT I NEED TO BEAT YOU THERE!
EH? METHINKS I KNOW WHAT THOU SEEKEST, ARMORED ONE!
POWER! THY ENERGY IS DIMINISHED! THOU ART GROWING TOO WEAK TO CONTINUE--
--AND TOO SLOW TO ESCAPE!
LET ONE FINAL THUNDEROUS BLOW FINISH THIS, THEN!
WHAK!
UHH!
PERHAPS HERE ABIDE OTHER AVENGER WHO MAY EXPLAIN THY MADNESS TO ME!
THE WORLD SPINS CRAZILY AS IRON MAN FALLS, BUT HE SEES HERCULES STEP PAST HIM...
IF HE... GOES INTO... LIBRARY... TYPHON WILL... AMBUSH HIM!
HAVE TO KEEP HIM ...HERE!
I'VE GOT TO SLOW HIM DOWN... BUY A FEW MORE SECONDS... SOMEHOW!
GOOD THING... I KNOW THIS PLACE... LIKE I KNOW MY OWN ARMOR!
THIS POWER LINE CARRIES HIGH VOLTAGE FOR THE LABS... SHOULD STUN HIM!
ZAK!
BUT... I'M... BLACKING... OUT...
THE SEARING CURRENT ACCOMPLISHES ITS TASK--


--TOO WELL. THE STRAIN OF BATTLE HAS WEAKENED HERCULES MORE THAN THE ARMORED AVENGER SUSPECTED. THUS, THE SUDDEN ATTACK FELLS THE PRINCE OF POWER-- AND BOTH HEROES LIE HELPLESS...
THOU HAST DONE WELL, LITTLE MAN OF METAL--
--THOUGH MANY TIMES I WAS TEMPTED TO SLAY THY BRUTISH ALLY, THINKING THAT THOU WERT SCHEMING TO BETRAY TYPHON!
BUT OF COURSE HE WAS, MONSTER! HE DELIBERATELY DRAGGED THE BATTLE OUT AND BROUGHT IT HERE--
--KNOWING THAT WE WOULD FOLLOW!
WHAT--?! MORE HUMANS!
YOU BET! NOT EXACTLY YOUR GARDEN VARIETY, THOUGH!
I, F'RINSTANCE, AM SORT OF A WALKING POPSICLE!
ARRGHH!
BAH! THY FRIGID BLASTS CANNOT HARM ME!
I AM A SCION OF TYPHOEUS, LORD OF STORMWINDS AND BLIZZARDS!
THOU SHALT FARE LESS WELL 'GAINST THE FIRE AND LIGHTNING I WIELD BY PLUTO'S GRACE!
KZAP!


SUDDENLY...
EYES FRONT, CONEHEAD!
YOU AND I HAVE A SCORE TO SETTLE!
THUMP!
WHAT!? THOU WERT BOUND IN ROPES SPUN OF STEEL!
RIGHT! AND IT TICKED ME OFF-- ENOUGH SO I FINALLY BROKE THOSE STUPID ROPES!
IT SEEMS LIKE EVERY TIME I TURN AROUND ANYMORE I'M BEING CAPTURED, CLOBBERED OR HELD HOSTAGE--
--AND I'M SICK OF IT!
THEN DIE, BEAST! TYPHON WILL END THY TRIALS!
ROTSA RUCK, CLUCK!
HMM! IT'S ALL BECOMING CLEAR, FINALLY! THE BEAST WAS HELD HOSTAGE!
I HEARD HE WAS IN THE HOSPITAL, ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHER AVENGERS WHO WERE INJURED IN A RECENT BATTLE WITH ULTRON*-- BUT AM I GLAD TO BE WRONG!
I SUPPOSE HE WAS DISCHARGED FIRST BECAUSE OF HIS REKNOWNED RECUPERATIVE POWERS! STILL, HE'S CERTAINLY IN NO SHAPE TO KEEP OUT OF TYPHON'S GRASP FOR LONG!
I'VE GOT TO STRIKE QUICKLY!
*LAST ISSUE--ARCH.


AHHRH!
KRAK!
FORGET ABOUT ME, TYPHON?
SURPRISED THAT I CAN HURT YOU?
NO MATTER HOW TOUGH AN ENEMY IS, HE MUST HAVE A WEAK POINT--
--AND NO MATTER HOW STRONG AN ENEMY MAY BE, HIS STRENGTH CAN BE TURNED AGAINST HIM!
NO! THIS CANNOT BE!
ONLY HERCULES HIMSELF HAS EVER TOPPLED TYPHON BEFORE! YOU MUST DIE FOR THIS, WOMAN!
OH, FIDDLE!
UHH!
WHOK
WAY TO GO, BEASTIE!
JUST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS IN THE X-MEN, EH, MR. DRAKE?
ARRGH!
THE BOUNCING, BOMBASTIC BEAST SETS 'EM UP--
--AND I PUT 'EM ON ICE, PARTNER!
LAY IT ON THICK, ICEMAN! HE'S STRONGER THAN DIRT!


FOOLS! I AM TYPHON, WHOSE STRENGTH ONLY HERCULES CAN MATCH!
KEEP POURING IT ON, BOBBY! HURRY!
I'M TRYING, 'TASHA!
I AM TYPHON! TITAN... IMMORTAL!
I WILL NOT BE IMPRISONED BY A MORTAL!
BA-DOOM!
NEVER!
ENOUGH OF THY TRICKS!
LET FIRE AND LIGHTNING BATTER THY BODIES AND WILT THY SPIRITS!
OH-H!
HOLY HANNAH!
UFF!


NOW... RID OF THY PETTY ANNOYANCE, I SHALL DEAL WITH--
HERCULES, BASE ONE?
HERCULES, WHO IS STUNNED NO LONGER!
--HERCULES!
AND THE METAL ONE STANDS WITH THEE NOW!
NO!
YES, TYPHON! WE ALL STAND AGAINST YOU NOW--AVENGERS AND CHAMPIONS ALIKE! SURRENDER, OR... WHA--?
HE'S... FADING OUT!
PLUTO KNOWS I CANNOT DEFEAT ALL OF THEE!
HE--HE'S DRAWING ME BACK TO HADES!
BUT I WILL YET BE FREE! I WILL RETURN AND--
WHEW! IT'S OVER! HERCULES... I'M SORRY ABOUT--
NAY, METHINKS I UNDERSTAND NOW!
THOU ART BLAMELESS, IRON MAN!
SO HE IS... BUT YOU'RE NOT, McCOY, ARE YOU? YOU'RE A REAL FUNNY MAN--AN AVENGER, AND NOT MUCH ELSE...
...YET FOR WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WORTH AS A HERO, LATELY, YOU MIGHT AS WELL JOIN A ZOO!

NEXT ISSUE: A TURNING POINT FOR THE BEAST--THE SECRET OF WONDER MAN'S *And* **THE LETHAL LEGION!!** BE HERE!

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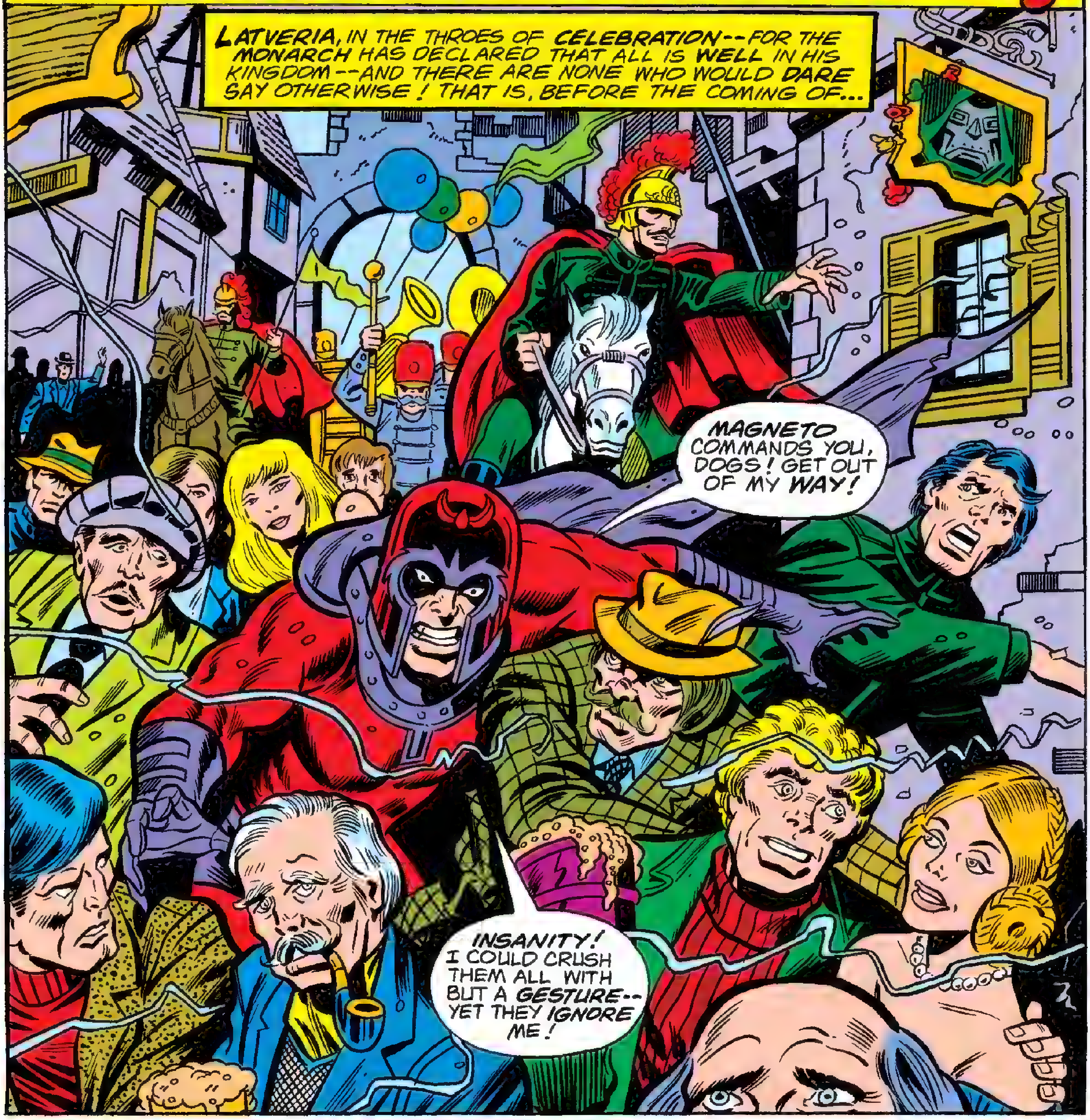
TM
DR. DOOM AND MAGNETO!
SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP TM
IS THIS THE FINAL HOUR? DOOM SUPREME!
MAGNETO HAS DARED TO CHALLENGE ME!
BOW, SLAVES-- AND SHOW HIM EARTH'S TRUE MASTER!
BYRNE AUSTIN

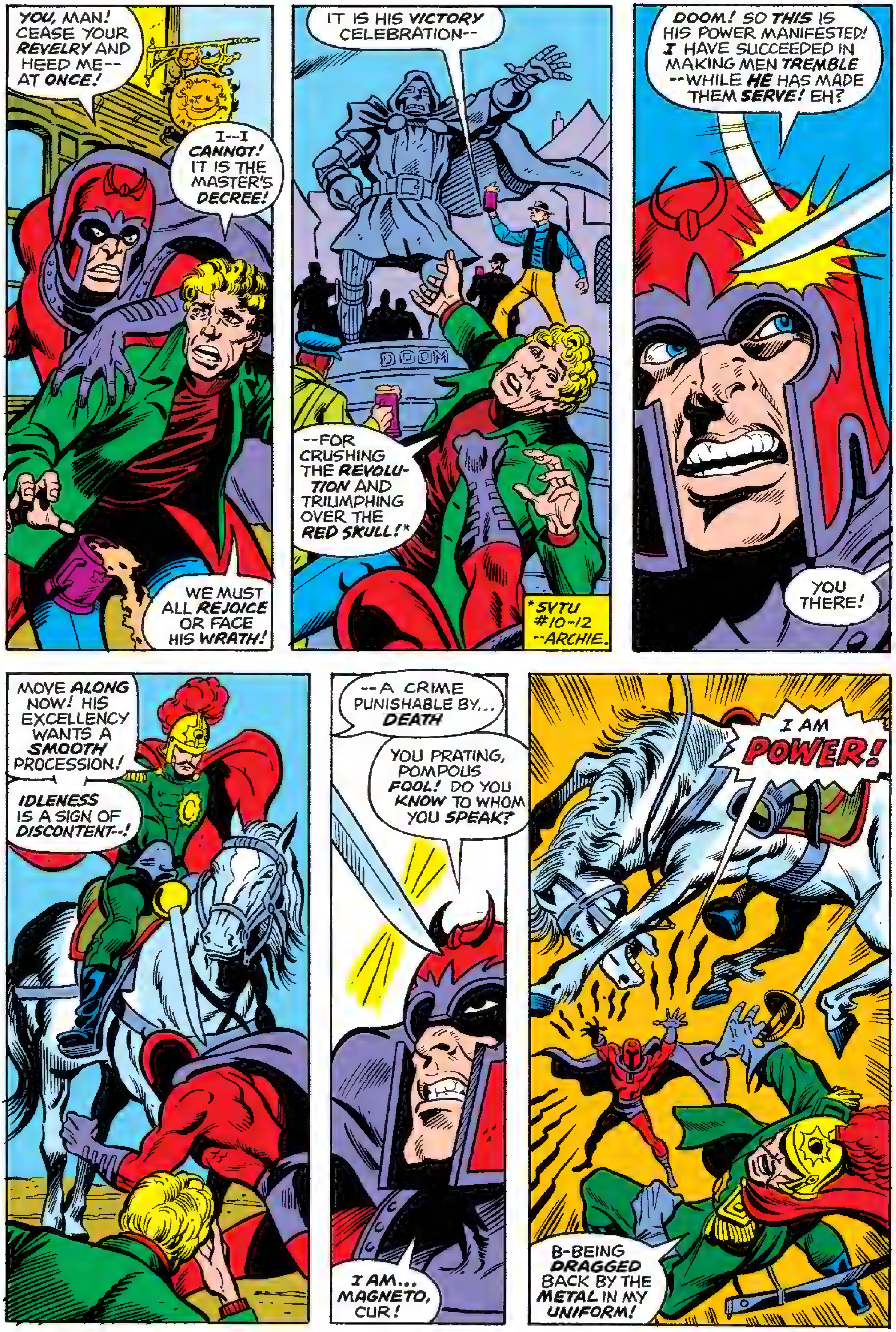
One is the armor-clad monarch of a shadowed European state, the other, the master of the deadly power, magnetism. Their titanic confrontation can lead to an alliance for world domination, or a struggle that results in world DESTRUCTION!

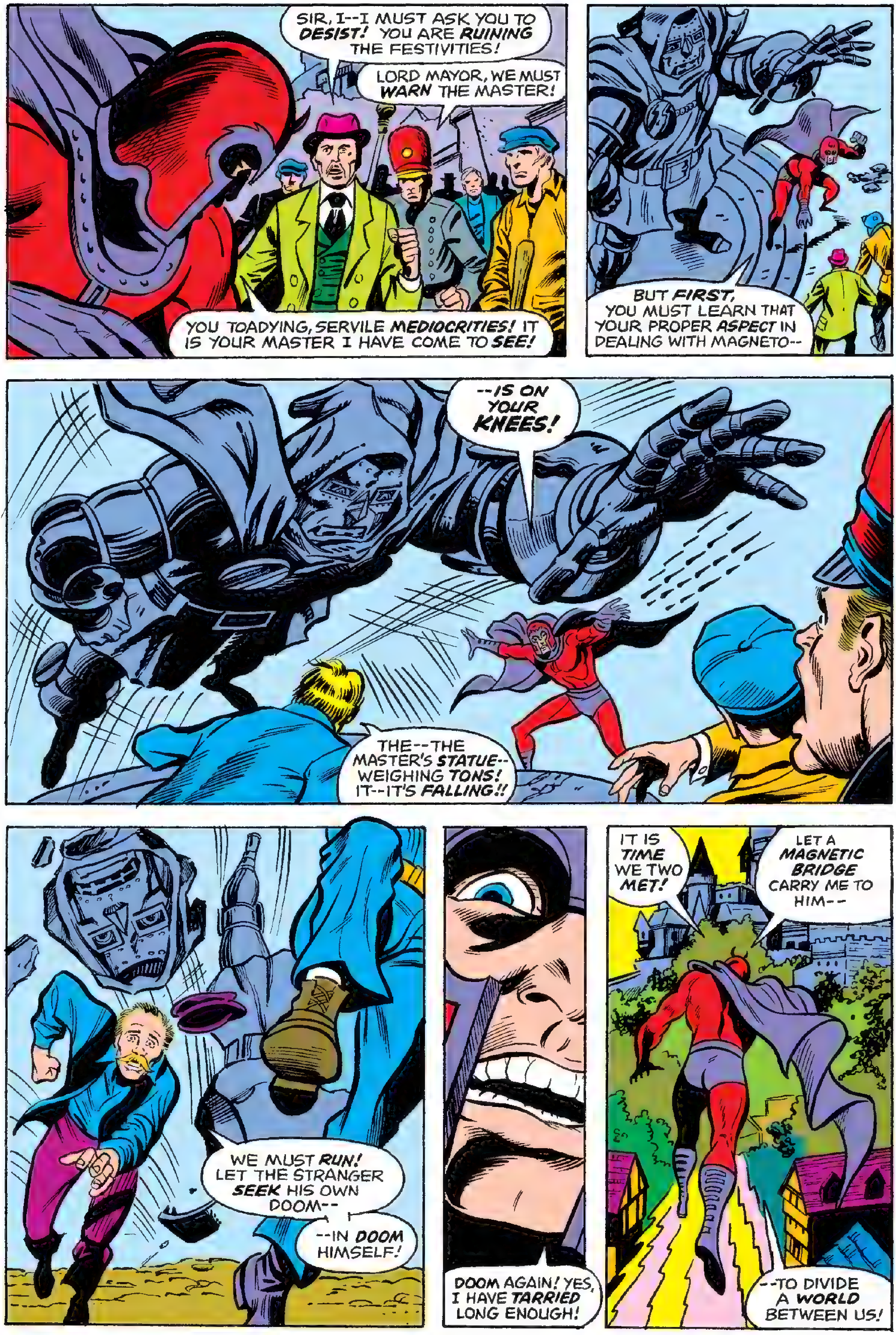
STAN LEE PRESENTS: **DR. DOOM AND MAGNETO!**

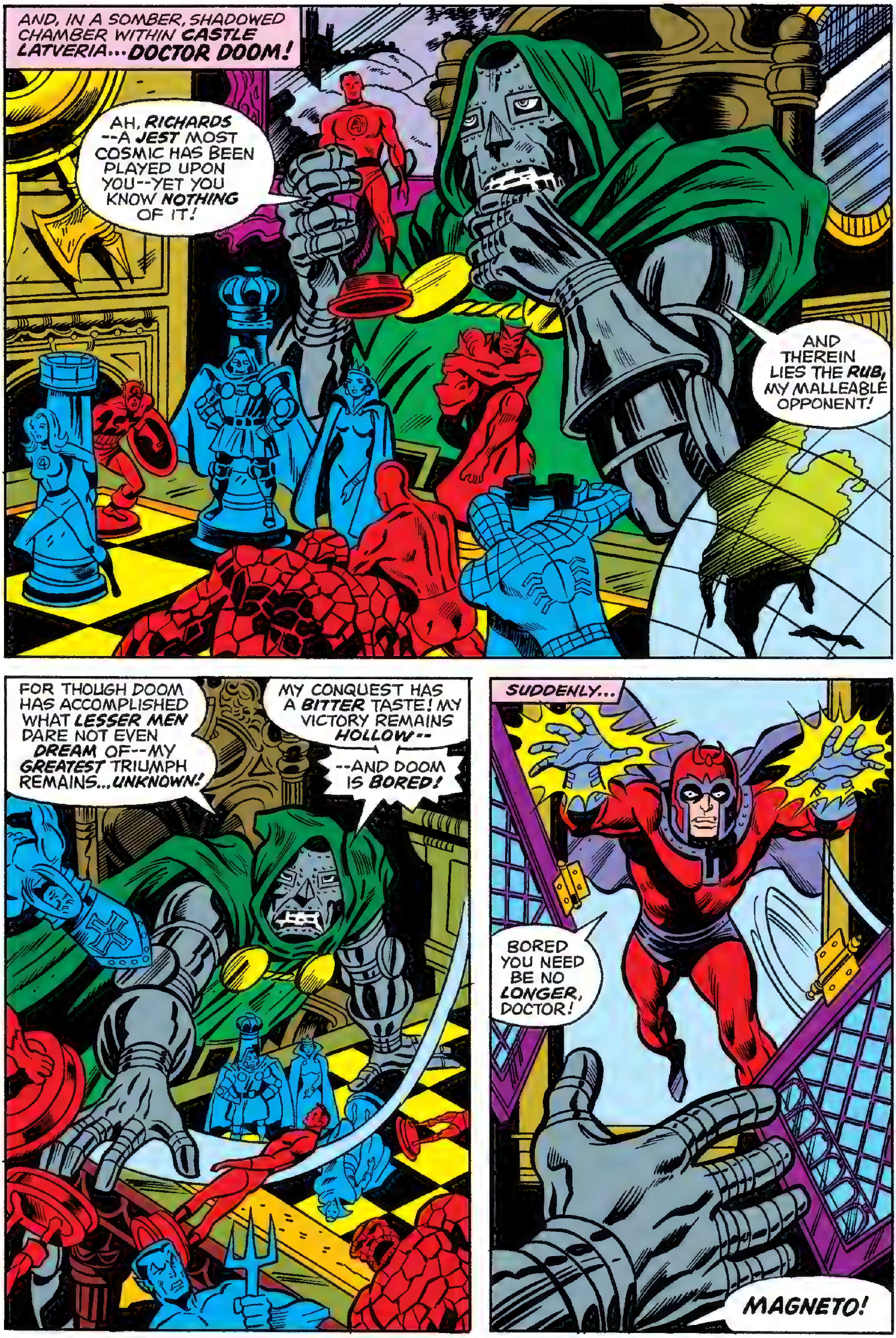
INCOMPARABLE STORY by BILL MANTLO / INCREDIBLE ART by BOB HALL / INDELIBLE INKING by DON PERLIN & DUFFY VOHLAND / IRV W. LETTERER DON W. COLORIST / INEXHAUSTIBLE EDITING by ARCHIE GOODWIN

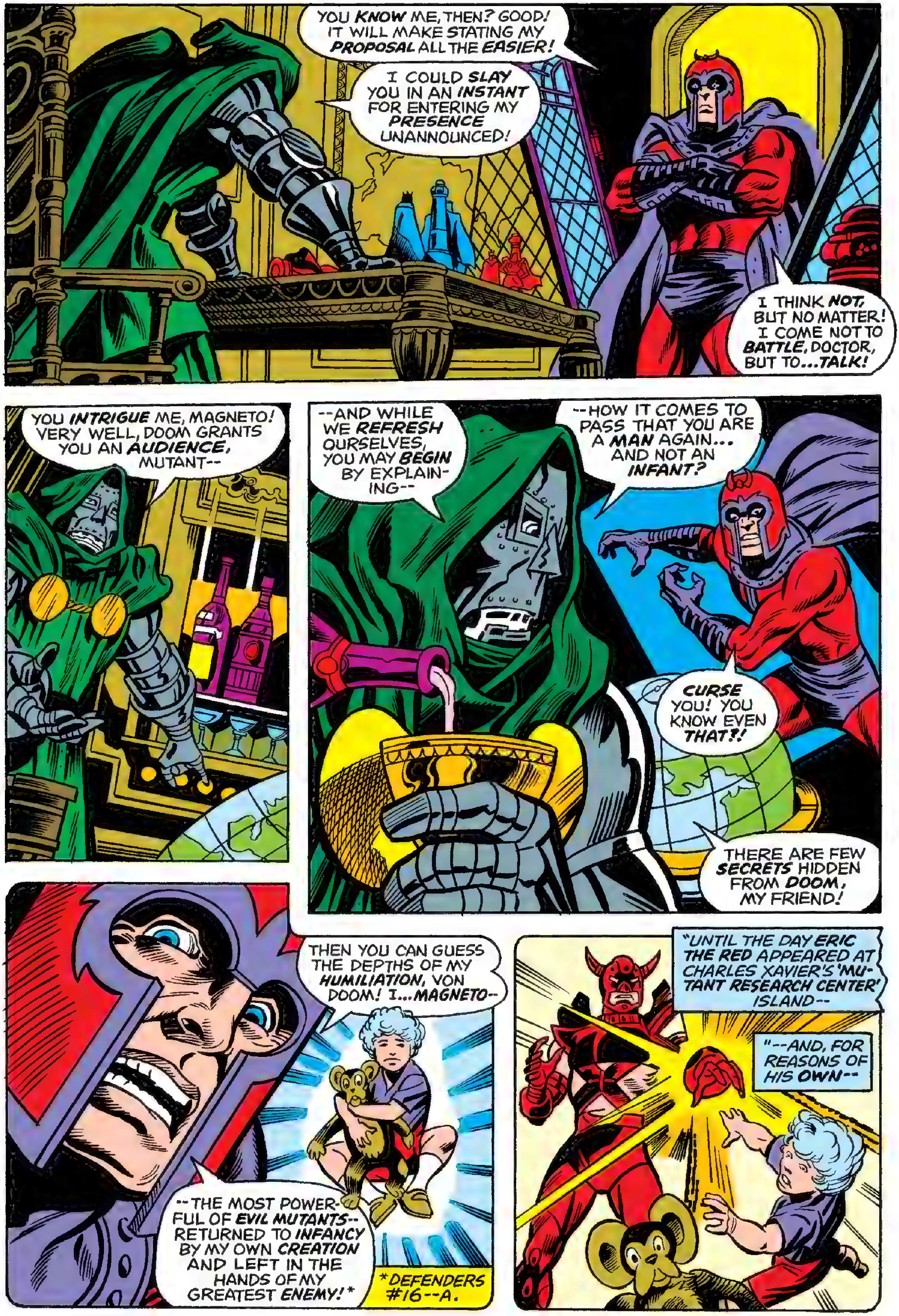
A WORLD FOR THE WINNING!

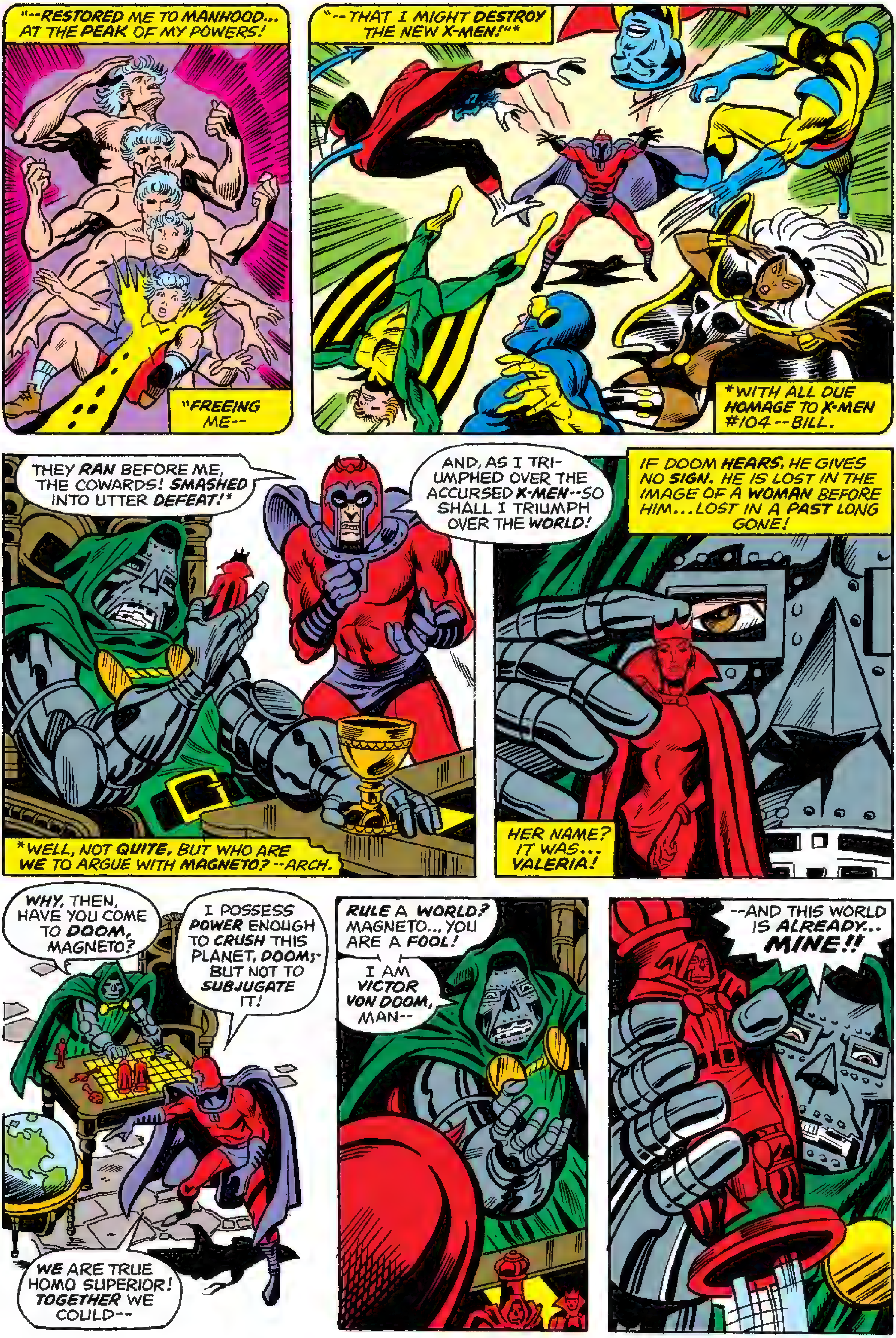

LATVERIA, IN THE THROES OF CELEBRATION--FOR THE MONARCH HAS DECLARED THAT ALL IS WELL IN HIS KINGDOM--AND THERE ARE NONE WHO WOULD DARE SAY OTHERWISE! THAT IS, BEFORE THE COMING OF...
MAGNETO COMMANDS YOU, DOGS! GET OUT OF MY WAY!
INSANITY! I COULD CRUSH THEM ALL WITH BUT A GESTURE-- YET THEY IGNORE ME!

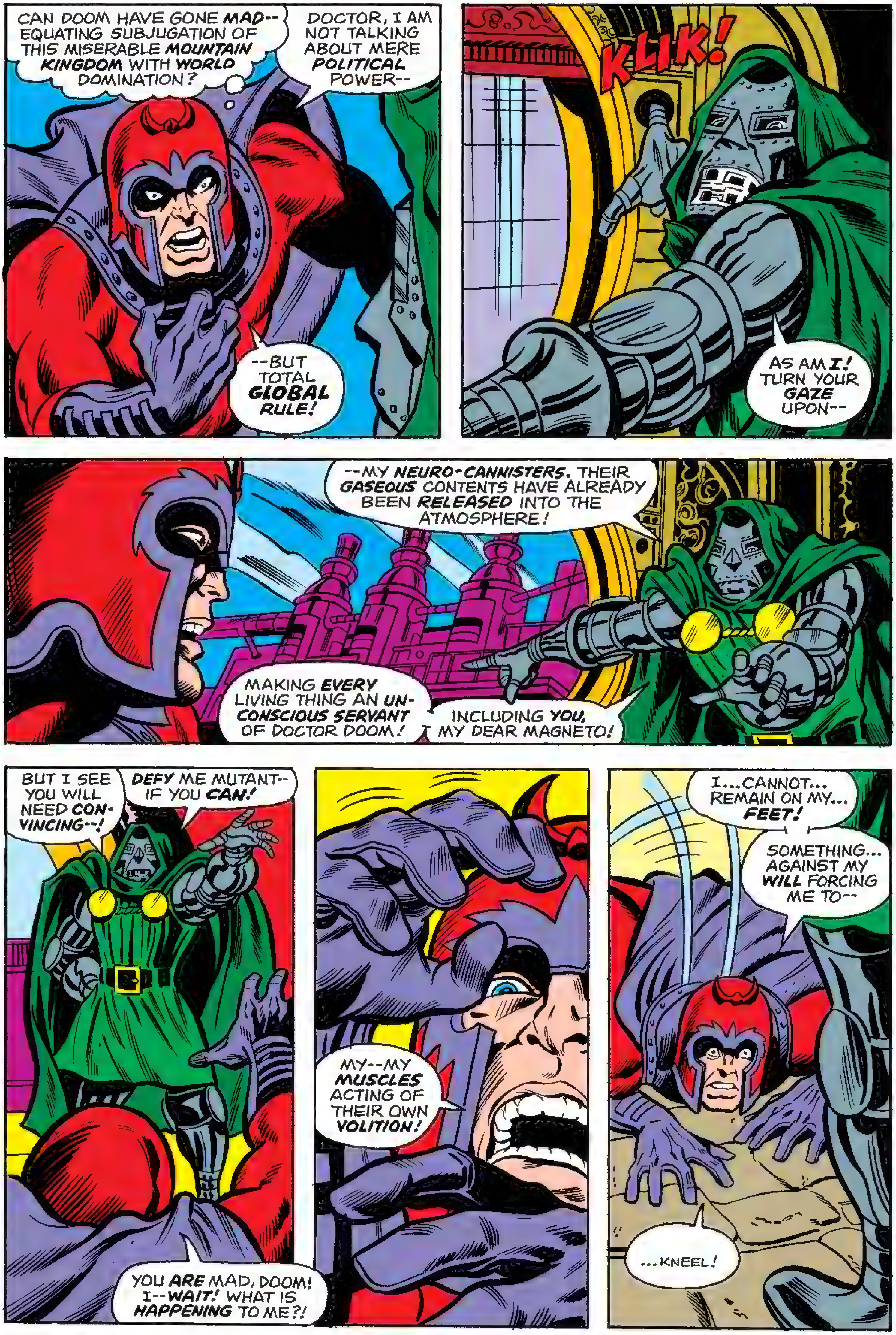

YOU, MAN! CEASE YOUR REVELRY AND HEED ME-- AT ONCE!
I--I CANNOT! IT IS THE MASTER'S DECREE!
WE MUST ALL REJOICE OR FACE HIS WRATH!
IT IS HIS VICTORY CELEBRATION--
DOOM
--FOR CRUSHING THE REVOLUTION AND TRIUMPHING OVER THE RED SKULL!*
*SVTU #10-12 --ARCHIE.
DOOM! SO THIS IS HIS POWER MANIFESTED! I HAVE SUCCEEDED IN MAKING MEN TREMBLE --WHILE HE HAS MADE THEM SERVE! EH?
YOU THERE!
MOVE ALONG NOW! HIS EXCELLENCY WANTS A SMOOTH PROCESSION!
IDLENESS IS A SIGN OF DISCONTENT--!
--A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY... DEATH
YOU PRATING, POMPOUS FOOL! DO YOU KNOW TO WHOM YOU SPEAK?
I AM... MAGNETO, CUR!
I AM POWER!
B-BEING DRAGGED BACK BY THE METAL IN MY UNIFORM!

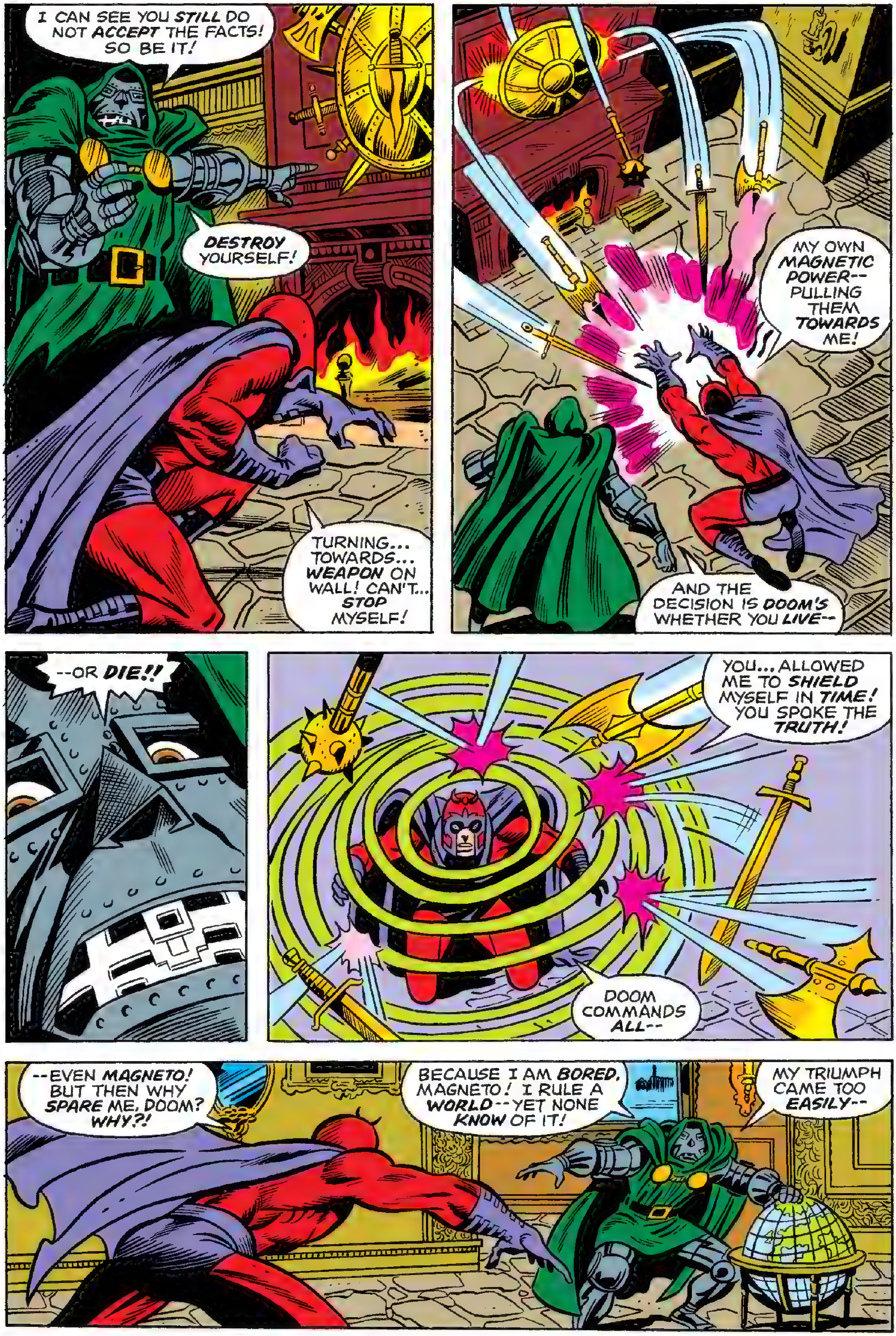

SIR, I--I MUST ASK YOU TO *DESIST!* YOU ARE *RUINING* THE FESTIVITIES!
LORD MAYOR, WE MUST *WARN* THE MASTER!
YOU TOADYING, SERVILE *MEDIOCRITIES!* IT IS YOUR MASTER I HAVE COME TO *SEE!*
BUT *FIRST,* YOU MUST LEARN THAT YOUR PROPER *ASPECT* IN DEALING WITH MAGNETO--
--*IS ON YOUR KNEES!*
THE--THE MASTER'S *STATUE*--WEIGHING *TONS!* IT--IT'S *FALLING!!*
WE MUST *RUN!* LET THE STRANGER *SEEK* HIS OWN DOOM--
--IN *DOOM* HIMSELF!
DOOM AGAIN! YES, I HAVE *TARRIED* LONG ENOUGH!
IT IS *TIME* WE TWO *MET!*
LET A *MAGNETIC BRIDGE* CARRY ME TO HIM--
--TO DIVIDE A *WORLD* BETWEEN US!

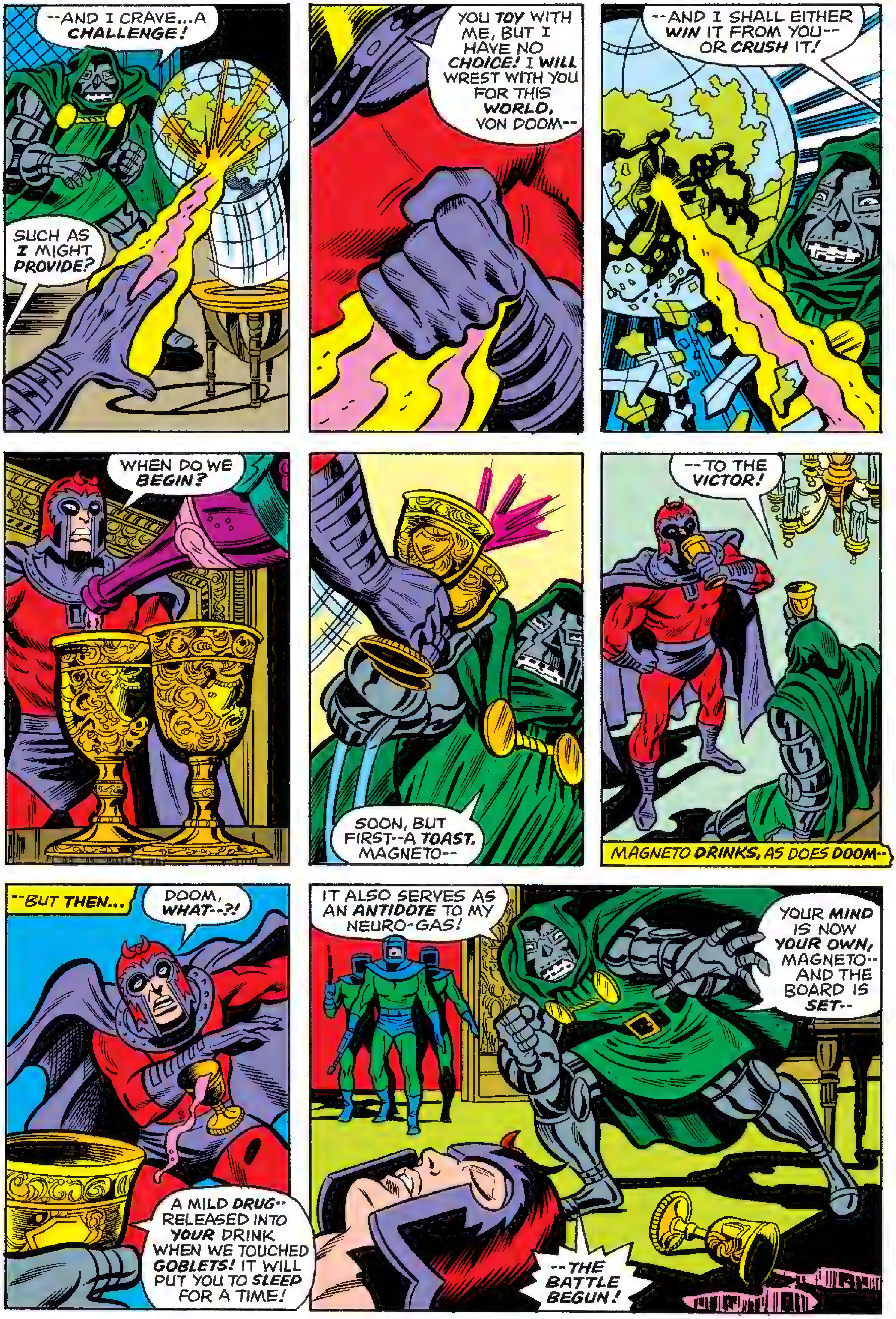

AND, IN A SOMBER, SHADOWED CHAMBER WITHIN **CASTLE LATVERIA**... **DOCTOR DOOM!**
AH, **RICHARDS** --A **JEST** MOST COSMIC HAS BEEN PLAYED UPON YOU--YET YOU KNOW **NOTHING** OF IT!
AND THEREIN LIES THE **RUB,** MY MALLEABLE OPPONENT!
FOR THOUGH DOOM HAS ACCOMPLISHED WHAT **LESSER MEN** DARE NOT EVEN **DREAM** OF--MY **GREATEST** TRIUMPH REMAINS... **UNKNOWN!**
MY CONQUEST HAS A **BITTER** TASTE! MY VICTORY REMAINS **HOLLOW**--
--AND DOOM IS **BORED!**
SUDDENLY...
BORED YOU NEED BE NO **LONGER,** DOCTOR!
MAGNETO!

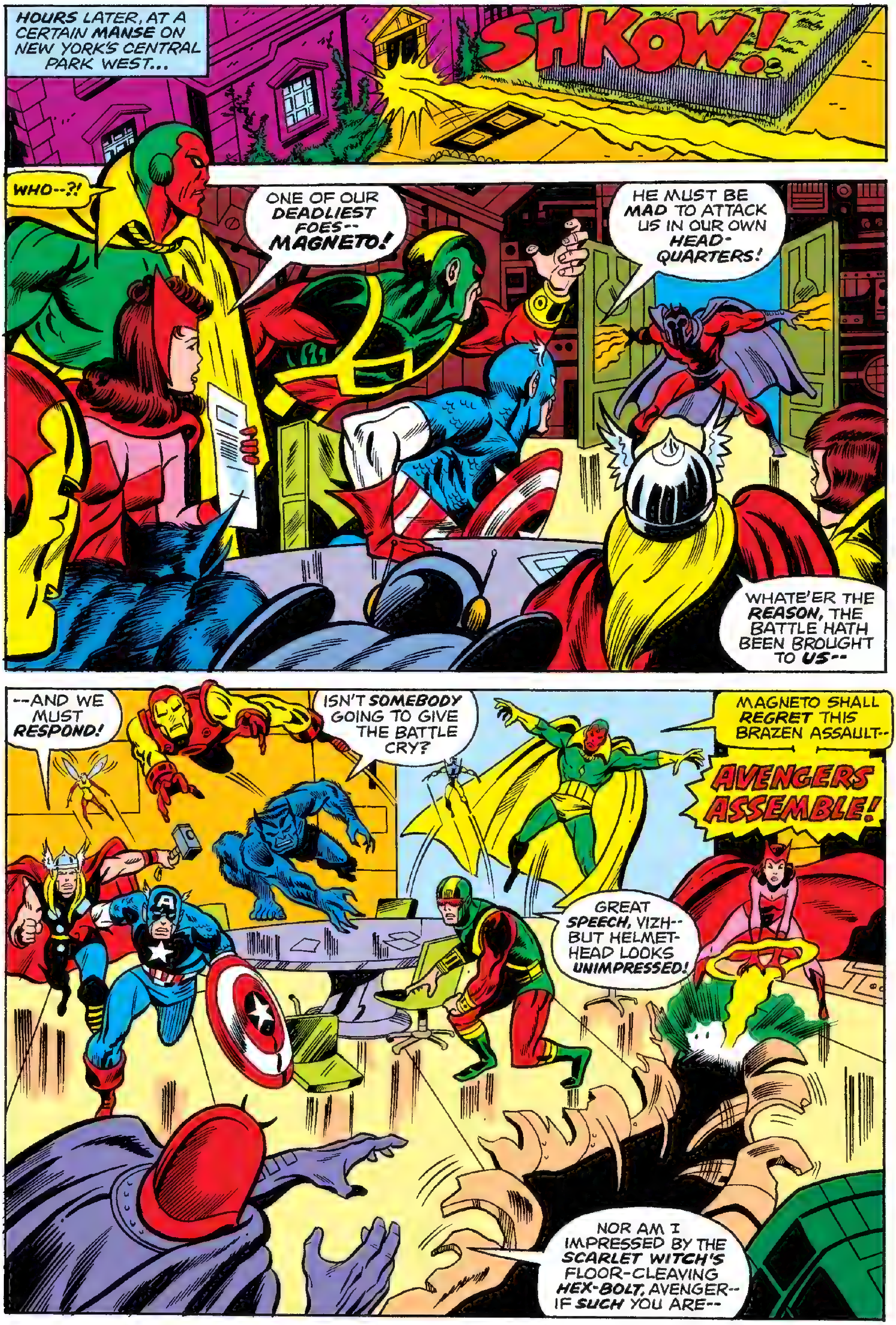

YOU KNOW ME, THEN? GOOD! IT WILL MAKE STATING MY PROPOSAL ALL THE EASIER!
I COULD SLAY YOU IN AN INSTANT FOR ENTERING MY PRESENCE UNANNOUNCED!
I THINK NOT, BUT NO MATTER! I COME NOT TO BATTLE, DOCTOR, BUT TO... TALK!
YOU INTRIGUE ME, MAGNETO! VERY WELL, DOOM GRANTS YOU AN AUDIENCE, MUTANT--
--AND WHILE WE REFRESH OURSELVES, YOU MAY BEGIN BY EXPLAINING--
--HOW IT COMES TO PASS THAT YOU ARE A MAN AGAIN... AND NOT AN INFANT?
CURSE YOU! YOU KNOW EVEN THAT?!
THERE ARE FEW SECRETS HIDDEN FROM DOOM, MY FRIEND!
THEN YOU CAN GUESS THE DEPTHS OF MY HUMILIATION, VON DOOM! I... MAGNETO--
--THE MOST POWERFUL OF EVIL MUTANTS--RETURNED TO INFANCY BY MY OWN CREATION AND LEFT IN THE HANDS OF MY GREATEST ENEMY!*
*DEFENDERS #16--A.
"UNTIL THE DAY ERIC THE RED APPEARED AT CHARLES XAVIER'S 'MUTANT RESEARCH CENTER' ISLAND--
"--AND, FOR REASONS OF HIS OWN--

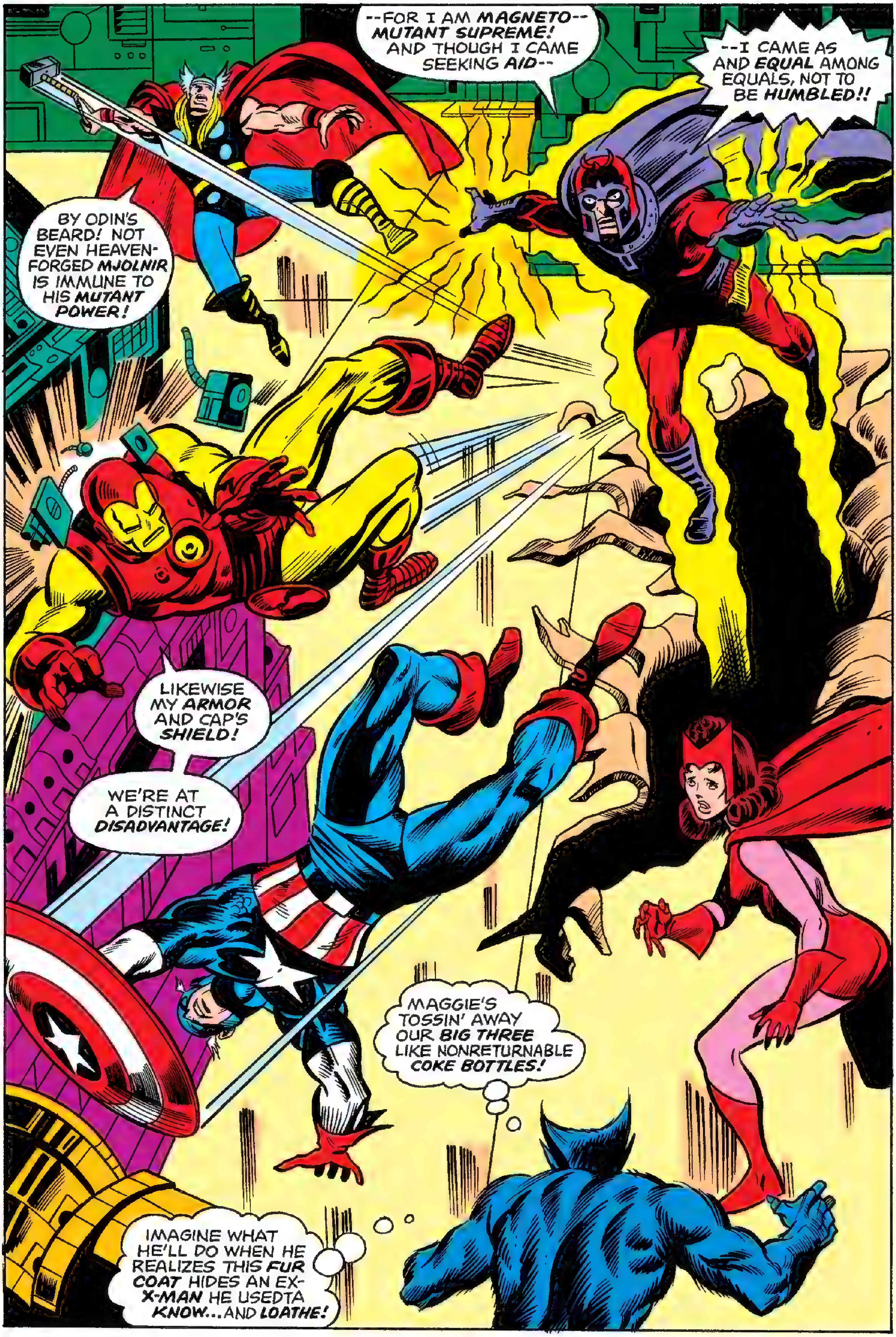

"--RESTORED ME TO MANHOOD... AT THE PEAK OF MY POWERS!
"FREEING ME--
"--THAT I MIGHT DESTROY THE NEW X-MEN!"*
*WITH ALL DUE HOMAGE TO X-MEN #104 --BILL.
THEY RAN BEFORE ME, THE COWARDS! SMASHED INTO UTTER DEFEAT!*
AND, AS I TRIUMPHED OVER THE ACCURSED X-MEN--SO SHALL I TRIUMPH OVER THE WORLD!
*WELL, NOT QUITE. BUT WHO ARE WE TO ARGUE WITH MAGNETO? --ARCH.
IF DOOM HEARS, HE GIVES NO SIGN. HE IS LOST IN THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN BEFORE HIM... LOST IN A PAST LONG GONE!
HER NAME? IT WAS... VALERIA!
WHY, THEN, HAVE YOU COME TO DOOM, MAGNETO?
I POSSESS POWER ENOUGH TO CRUSH THIS PLANET, DOOM;-- BUT NOT TO SUBJUGATE IT!
WE ARE TRUE HOMO SUPERIOR! TOGETHER WE COULD--
RULE A WORLD? MAGNETO... YOU ARE A FOOL!
I AM VICTOR VON DOOM, MAN--
--AND THIS WORLD IS ALREADY... MINE!!

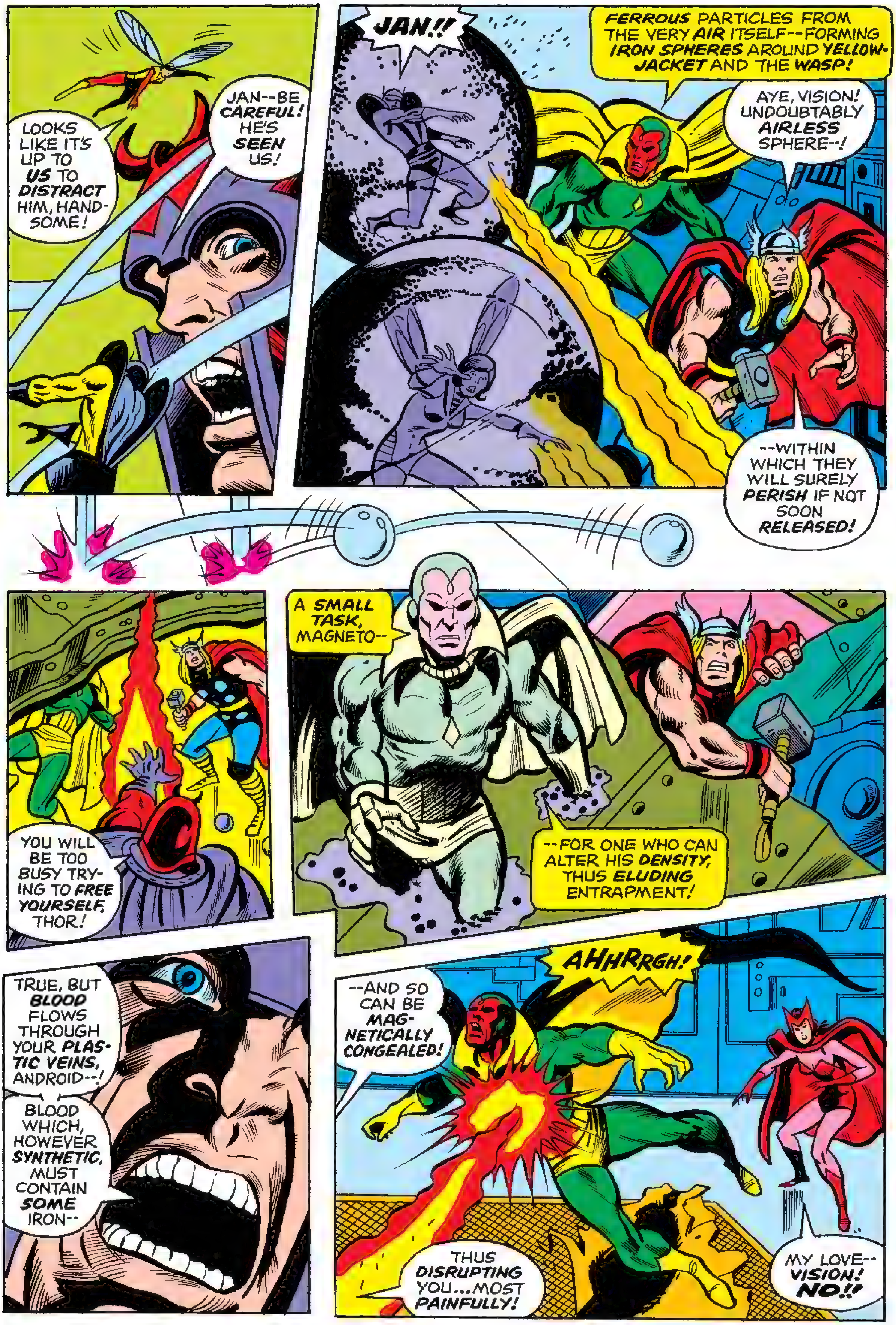

CAN DOOM HAVE GONE MAD-- EQUATING SUBJUGATION OF THIS MISERABLE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM WITH WORLD DOMINATION?
DOCTOR, I AM NOT TALKING ABOUT MERE POLITICAL POWER--
--BUT TOTAL GLOBAL RULE!
KLIK!
AS AM I! TURN YOUR GAZE UPON--
--MY NEURO-CANNISTERS. THEIR GASEOUS CONTENTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE!
MAKING EVERY LIVING THING AN UNCONSCIOUS SERVANT OF DOCTOR DOOM!
INCLUDING YOU, MY DEAR MAGNETO!
BUT I SEE YOU WILL NEED CONVINCING--!
DEFY ME MUTANT-- IF YOU CAN!
YOU ARE MAD, DOOM! I--WAIT! WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?!
MY--MY MUSCLES ACTING OF THEIR OWN VOLITION!
I...CANNOT... REMAIN ON MY... FEET!
SOMETHING... AGAINST MY WILL FORCING ME TO--
...KNEEL!

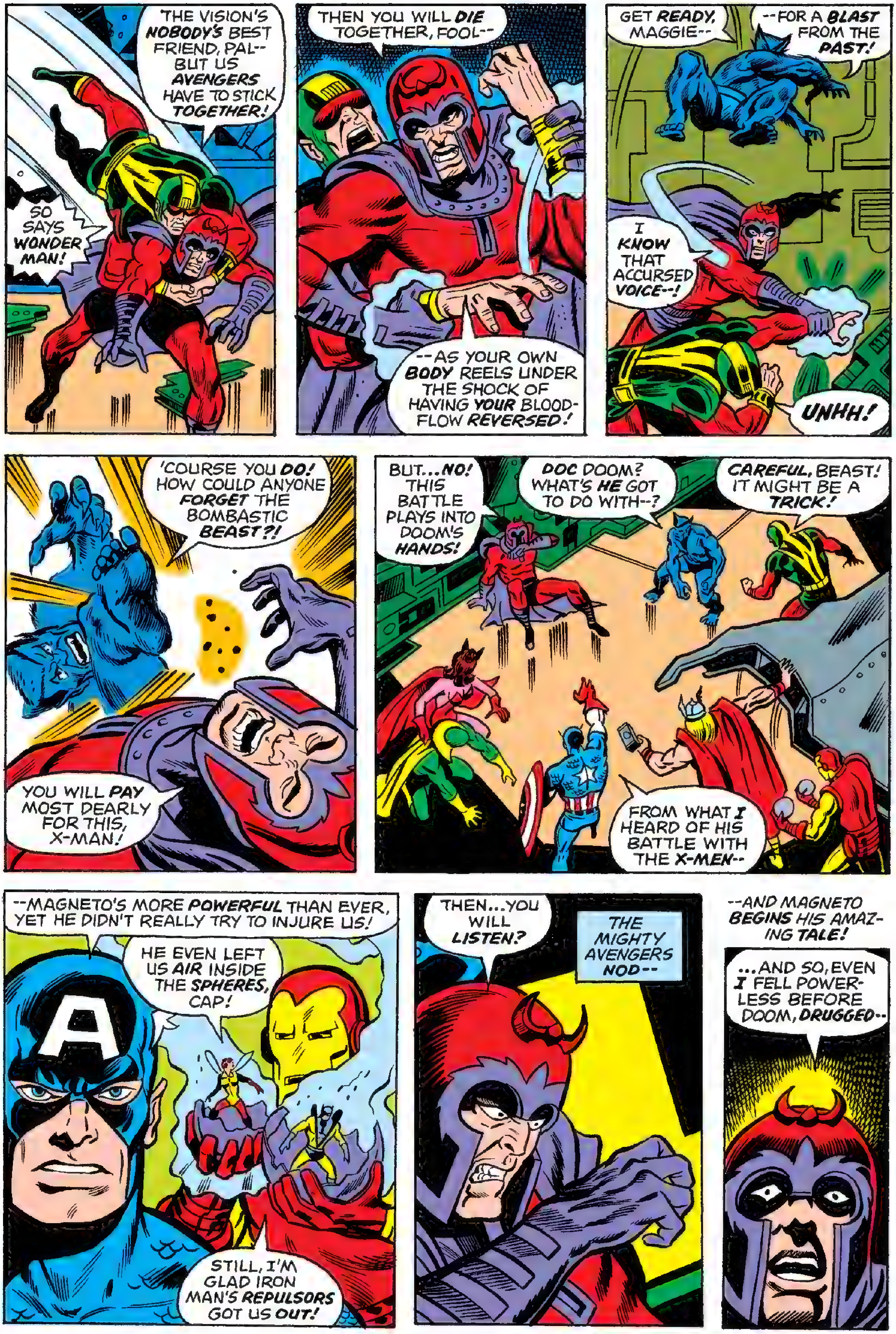

I CAN SEE YOU *STILL* DO NOT *ACCEPT* THE FACTS! SO BE IT!
DESTROY YOURSELF!
TURNING... TOWARDS... *WEAPON* ON WALL! CAN'T... *STOP* MYSELF!
MY OWN *MAGNETIC POWER*-- PULLING THEM *TOWARDS* ME!
AND THE DECISION IS *DOOM'S* WHETHER YOU *LIVE*--
--OR *DIE!!*
YOU... ALLOWED ME TO *SHIELD* MYSELF IN *TIME!* YOU SPOKE THE *TRUTH!*
DOOM COMMANDS *ALL*--
--EVEN *MAGNETO!* BUT THEN WHY *SPARE* ME, DOOM? *WHY?!*
BECAUSE I AM *BORED*, MAGNETO! I RULE A *WORLD*--YET NONE *KNOW* OF IT!
MY TRIUMPH CAME TOO *EASILY*--

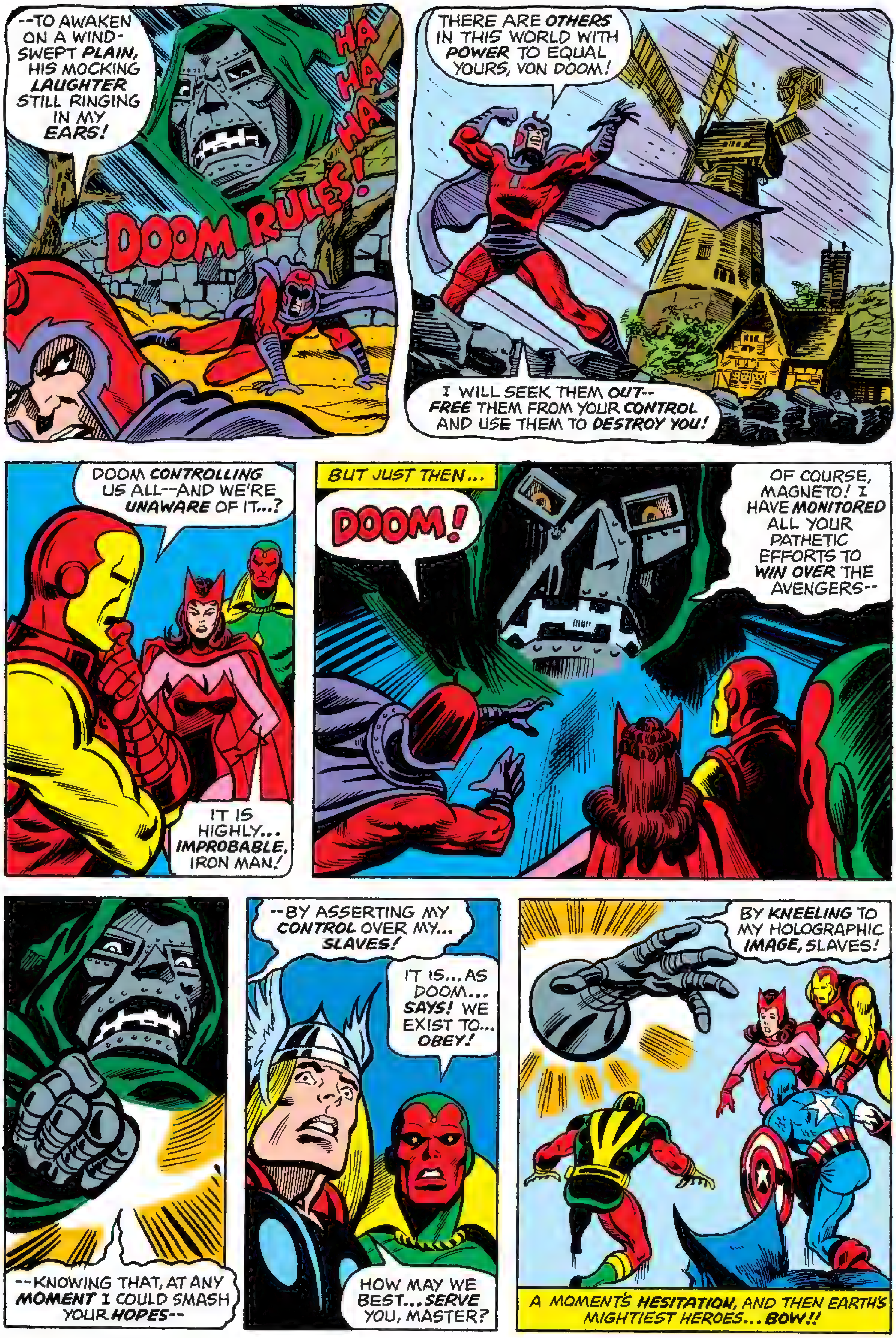

--AND I CRAVE...A **CHALLENGE!**
SUCH AS **I** MIGHT **PROVIDE?**
YOU **TOY** WITH ME, BUT I HAVE NO **CHOICE!** I **WILL** WREST WITH YOU FOR THIS **WORLD,** VON DOOM--
--AND I SHALL EITHER **WIN** IT FROM YOU--OR **CRUSH** IT!
WHEN DO WE **BEGIN?**
SOON, BUT FIRST--A **TOAST,** MAGNETO--
--TO THE **VICTOR!**
MAGNETO **DRINKS,** AS DOES **DOOM**--
--**BUT THEN...**
DOOM, **WHAT--?!**
A MILD **DRUG**--RELEASED INTO **YOUR** DRINK WHEN WE TOUCHED **GOBLETS!** IT WILL PUT YOU TO **SLEEP** FOR A TIME!
IT ALSO SERVES AS AN **ANTIDOTE** TO MY NEURO-GAS!
YOUR **MIND** IS NOW **YOUR OWN,** MAGNETO--AND THE BOARD IS **SET**--
--**THE BATTLE BEGUN!**

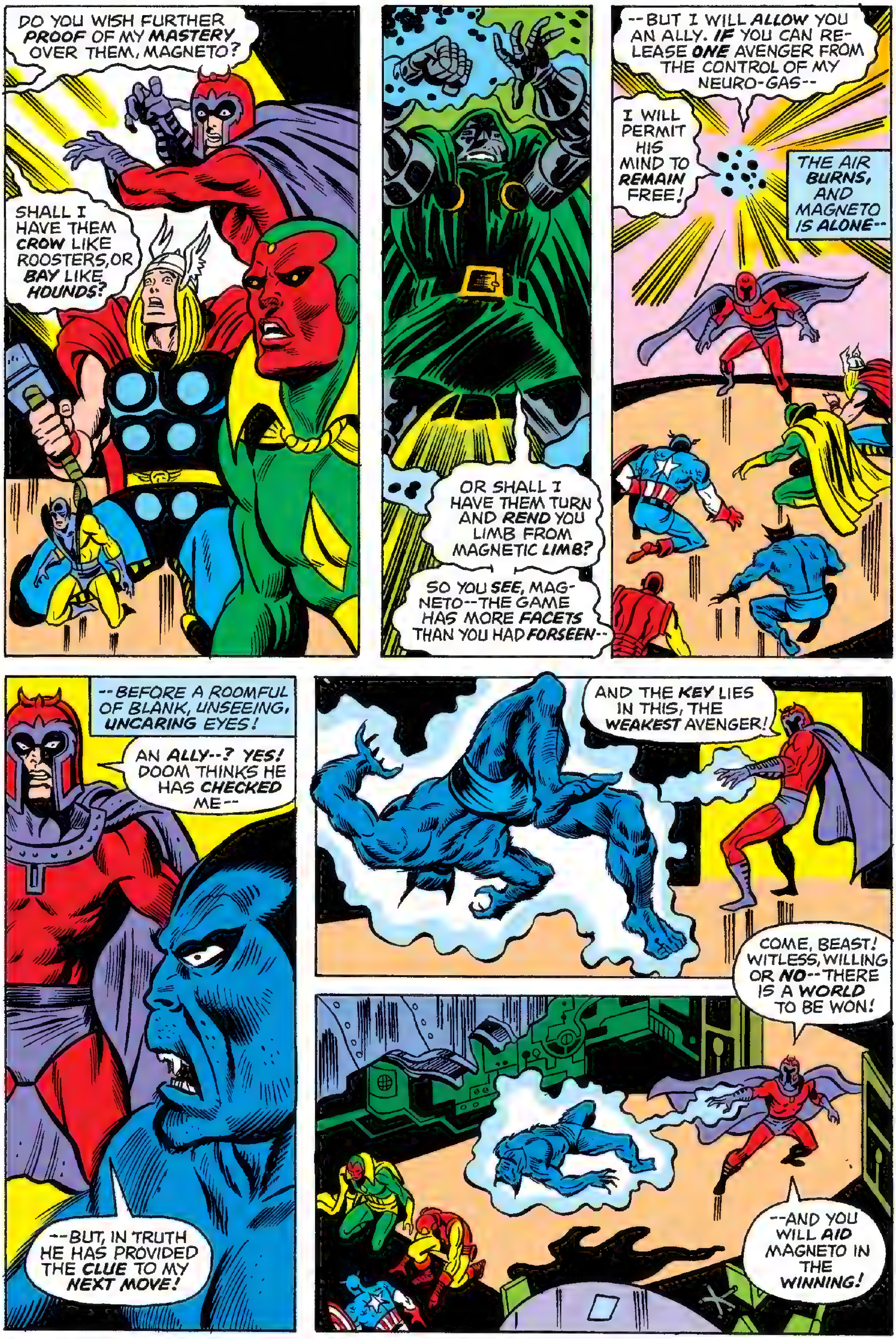

HOURS LATER, AT A CERTAIN MANSE ON NEW YORK'S CENTRAL PARK WEST...
SHKOW!
WHO--?!
ONE OF OUR DEADLIEST FOES-- MAGNETO!
HE MUST BE MAD TO ATTACK US IN OUR OWN HEAD-QUARTERS!
WHATE'ER THE REASON, THE BATTLE HATH BEEN BROUGHT TO US--
--AND WE MUST RESPOND!
ISN'T SOMEBODY GOING TO GIVE THE BATTLE CRY?
MAGNETO SHALL REGRET THIS BRAZEN ASSAULT--
AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
GREAT SPEECH, VIZH-- BUT HELMET-HEAD LOOKS UNIMPRESSED!
NOR AM I IMPRESSED BY THE SCARLET WITCH'S FLOOR-CLEAVING HEX-BOLT, AVENGER-- IF SUCH YOU ARE--

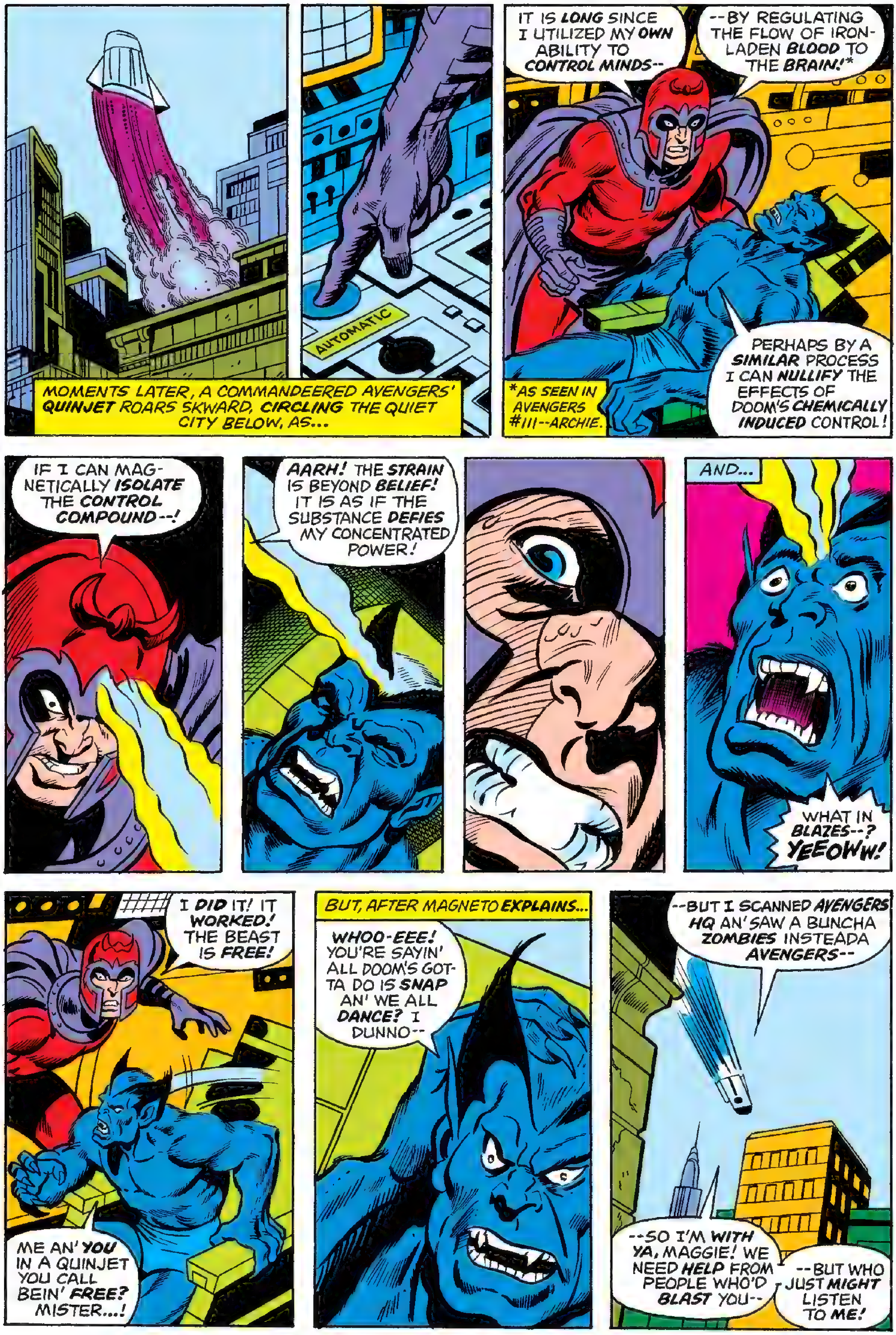

--FOR I AM MAGNETO--MUTANT SUPREME! AND THOUGH I CAME SEEKING AID--
--I CAME AS AND EQUAL AMONG EQUALS, NOT TO BE HUMBLED!!
BY ODIN'S BEARD! NOT EVEN HEAVEN-FORGED MJOLNIR IS IMMUNE TO HIS MUTANT POWER!
LIKEWISE MY ARMOR AND CAP'S SHIELD!
WE'RE AT A DISTINCT DISADVANTAGE!
MAGGIE'S TOSSIN' AWAY OUR BIG THREE LIKE NONRETURNABLE COKE BOTTLES!
IMAGINE WHAT HE'LL DO WHEN HE REALIZES THIS FUR COAT HIDES AN EX-X-MAN HE USEDTA KNOW...AND LOATHE!

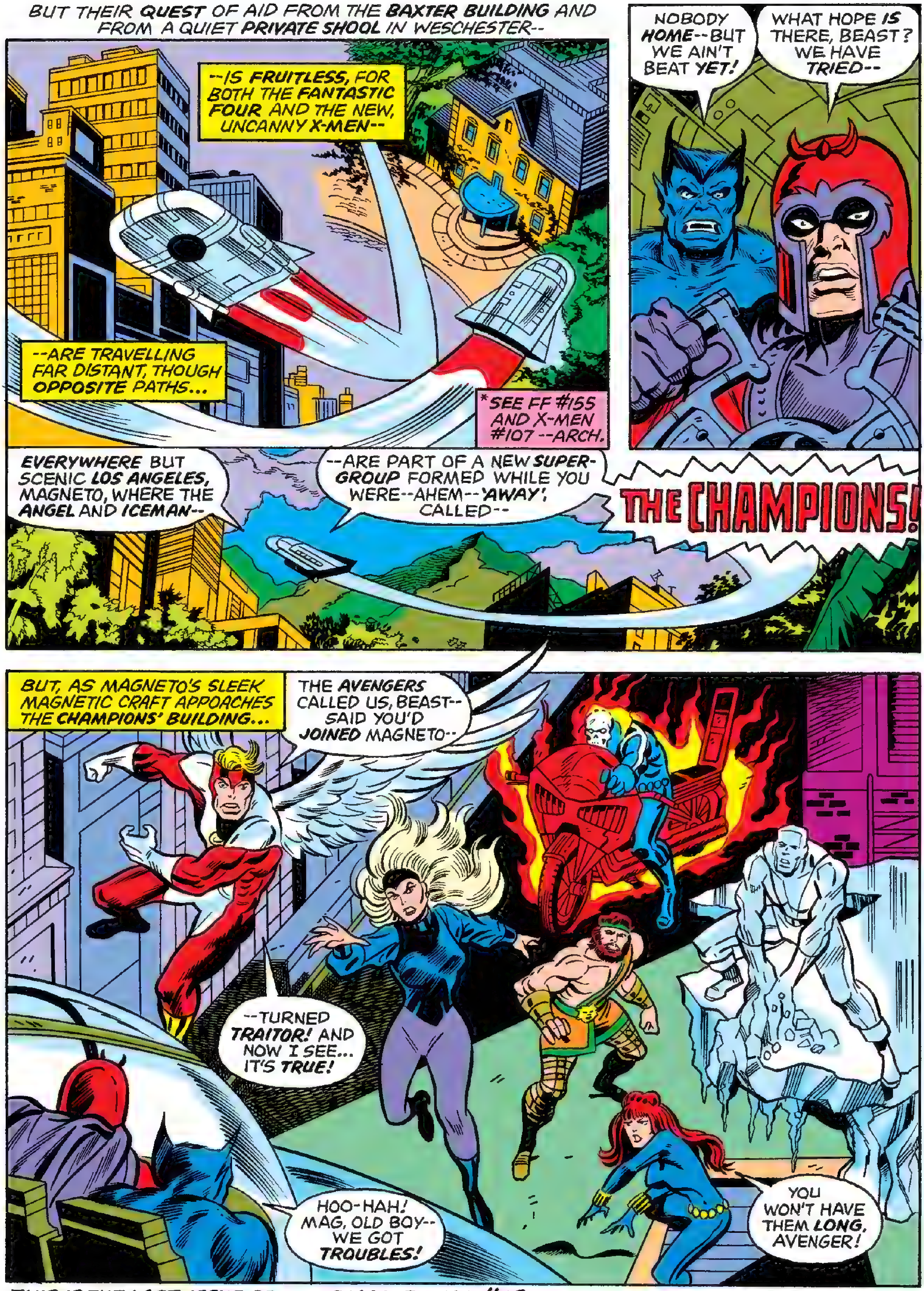

LOOKS LIKE IT'S UP TO **US** TO **DISTRACT** HIM, HANDSOME!
JAN--BE **CAREFUL!** HE'S **SEEN** US!
JAN!!
FERROUS PARTICLES FROM THE VERY **AIR** ITSELF--FORMING **IRON SPHERES** AROUND **YELLOWJACKET** AND THE **WASP!**
AYE, VISION! UNDOUBTABLY **AIRLESS** SPHERE--!
--WITHIN WHICH THEY WILL SURELY **PERISH** IF NOT SOON **RELEASED!**
YOU WILL BE TOO BUSY TRYING TO **FREE YOURSELF,** THOR!
A **SMALL TASK,** MAGNETO--
--FOR ONE WHO CAN ALTER HIS **DENSITY,** THUS **ELUDING** ENTRAPMENT!
TRUE, BUT **BLOOD** FLOWS THROUGH YOUR **PLASTIC VEINS,** ANDROID--!
BLOOD WHICH, HOWEVER **SYNTHETIC,** MUST CONTAIN **SOME** IRON--
--AND SO CAN BE **MAGNETICALLY CONGEALED!**
AHHRRGH!
THUS **DISRUPTING** YOU...MOST **PAINFULLY!**
MY LOVE--**VISION! NO!!**


THE VISION'S NOBODY'S BEST FRIEND, PAL-- BUT US AVENGERS HAVE TO STICK TOGETHER!
SO SAYS WONDER MAN!
THEN YOU WILL DIE TOGETHER, FOOL--
--AS YOUR OWN BODY REELS UNDER THE SHOCK OF HAVING YOUR BLOOD-FLOW REVERSED!
GET READY, MAGGIE--
--FOR A BLAST FROM THE PAST!
I KNOW THAT ACCURSED VOICE--!
UNHH!
'COURSE YOU DO! HOW COULD ANYONE FORGET THE BOMBASTIC BEAST?!
YOU WILL PAY MOST DEARLY FOR THIS, X-MAN!
BUT...NO! THIS BATTLE PLAYS INTO DOOM'S HANDS!
DOC DOOM? WHAT'S HE GOT TO DO WITH--?
CAREFUL, BEAST! IT MIGHT BE A TRICK!
FROM WHAT I HEARD OF HIS BATTLE WITH THE X-MEN--
--MAGNETO'S MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER, YET HE DIDN'T REALLY TRY TO INJURE US!
HE EVEN LEFT US AIR INSIDE THE SPHERES, CAP!
STILL, I'M GLAD IRON MAN'S REPULSORS GOT US OUT!
THEN...YOU WILL LISTEN?
THE MIGHTY AVENGERS NOD--
--AND MAGNETO BEGINS HIS AMAZING TALE!
...AND SO, EVEN I FELL POWERLESS BEFORE DOOM, DRUGGED--


--TO AWAKEN ON A WIND-SWEPT PLAIN, HIS MOCKING LAUGHTER STILL RINGING IN MY EARS!
HA HA HA HA
DOOM RULES!
THERE ARE OTHERS IN THIS WORLD WITH POWER TO EQUAL YOURS, VON DOOM!
I WILL SEEK THEM OUT-- FREE THEM FROM YOUR CONTROL AND USE THEM TO DESTROY YOU!
DOOM CONTROLLING US ALL--AND WE'RE UNAWARE OF IT...?
IT IS HIGHLY... IMPROBABLE, IRON MAN!
BUT JUST THEN...
DOOM!
OF COURSE, MAGNETO! I HAVE MONITORED ALL YOUR PATHETIC EFFORTS TO WIN OVER THE AVENGERS--
--KNOWING THAT, AT ANY MOMENT I COULD SMASH YOUR HOPES--
--BY ASSERTING MY CONTROL OVER MY... SLAVES!
IT IS... AS DOOM... SAYS! WE EXIST TO... OBEY!
HOW MAY WE BEST... SERVE YOU, MASTER?
BY KNEELING TO MY HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE, SLAVES!
A MOMENT'S HESITATION, AND THEN EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES... BOW!!


DO YOU WISH FURTHER PROOF OF MY MASTERY OVER THEM, MAGNETO?
SHALL I HAVE THEM CROW LIKE ROOSTERS, OR BAY LIKE HOUNDS?
OR SHALL I HAVE THEM TURN AND REND YOU LIMB FROM MAGNETIC LIMB?
SO YOU SEE, MAGNETO--THE GAME HAS MORE FACETS THAN YOU HAD FORSEEN--
--BUT I WILL ALLOW YOU AN ALLY. IF YOU CAN RELEASE ONE AVENGER FROM THE CONTROL OF MY NEURO-GAS--
I WILL PERMIT HIS MIND TO REMAIN FREE!
THE AIR BURNS, AND MAGNETO IS ALONE--
--BEFORE A ROOMFUL OF BLANK, UNSEEING, UNCARING EYES!
AN ALLY--? YES! DOOM THINKS HE HAS CHECKED ME--
--BUT, IN TRUTH HE HAS PROVIDED THE CLUE TO MY NEXT MOVE!
AND THE KEY LIES IN THIS, THE WEAKEST AVENGER!
COME, BEAST! WITLESS, WILLING OR NO--THERE IS A WORLD TO BE WON!
--AND YOU WILL AID MAGNETO IN THE WINNING!


MOMENTS LATER, A COMMANDEERED AVENGERS' QUINJET ROARS SKWARD, CIRCLING THE QUIET CITY BELOW, AS...
AUTOMATIC
IT IS LONG SINCE I UTILIZED MY OWN ABILITY TO CONTROL MINDS--
--BY REGULATING THE FLOW OF IRON-LADEN BLOOD TO THE BRAIN!*
PERHAPS BY A SIMILAR PROCESS I CAN NULLIFY THE EFFECTS OF DOOM'S CHEMICALLY INDUCED CONTROL!
*AS SEEN IN AVENGERS #111--ARCHIE.
IF I CAN MAGNETICALLY ISOLATE THE CONTROL COMPOUND--!
AARH! THE STRAIN IS BEYOND BELIEF! IT IS AS IF THE SUBSTANCE DEFIES MY CONCENTRATED POWER!
AND...
WHAT IN BLAZES--? YEEOWW!
I DID IT! IT WORKED! THE BEAST IS FREE!
ME AN' YOU IN A QUINJET YOU CALL BEIN' FREE? MISTER...!
BUT, AFTER MAGNETO EXPLAINS...
WHOO-EEE! YOU'RE SAYIN' ALL DOOM'S GOTTA DO IS SNAP AN' WE ALL DANCE? I DUNNO--
--BUT I SCANNED AVENGERS HQ AN' SAW A BUNCHA ZOMBIES INSTEADA AVENGERS--
--SO I'M WITH YA, MAGGIE! WE NEED HELP FROM PEOPLE WHO'D BLAST YOU--
--BUT WHO JUST MIGHT LISTEN TO ME!


BUT THEIR QUEST OF AID FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING AND FROM A QUIET PRIVATE SHOOL IN WESCHESTER--
--IS FRUITLESS, FOR BOTH THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND THE NEW, UNCANNY X-MEN--
--ARE TRAVELLING FAR DISTANT, THOUGH OPPOSITE PATHS...
*SEE FF #155 AND X-MEN #107 --ARCH.
NOBODY HOME--BUT WE AIN'T BEAT YET!
WHAT HOPE IS THERE, BEAST? WE HAVE TRIED--
EVERYWHERE BUT SCENIC LOS ANGELES, MAGNETO, WHERE THE ANGEL AND ICEMAN--
--ARE PART OF A NEW SUPER-GROUP FORMED WHILE YOU WERE--AHEM--'AWAY', CALLED--
THE CHAMPIONS!
BUT, AS MAGNETO'S SLEEK MAGNETIC CRAFT APPOACHES THE CHAMPIONS' BUILDING...
THE AVENGERS CALLED US, BEAST-- SAID YOU'D JOINED MAGNETO--
--TURNED TRAITOR! AND NOW I SEE... IT'S TRUE!
HOO-HAH! MAG, OLD BOY-- WE GOT TROUBLES!
YOU WON'T HAVE THEM LONG, AVENGER!

THIS IS THE ***LAST ISSUE*** OF ***SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP,*** BUT...THE PULSE-POUNDING CONCLUSION OF THIS ***EPIC TALE*** CAN BE FOUND IN...

CHAMPIONS #16 WITH SPECIAL **GUEST-STAR**

THE *INCREDIBLE HULK!*

THE CHAMPIONS TM
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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS TM
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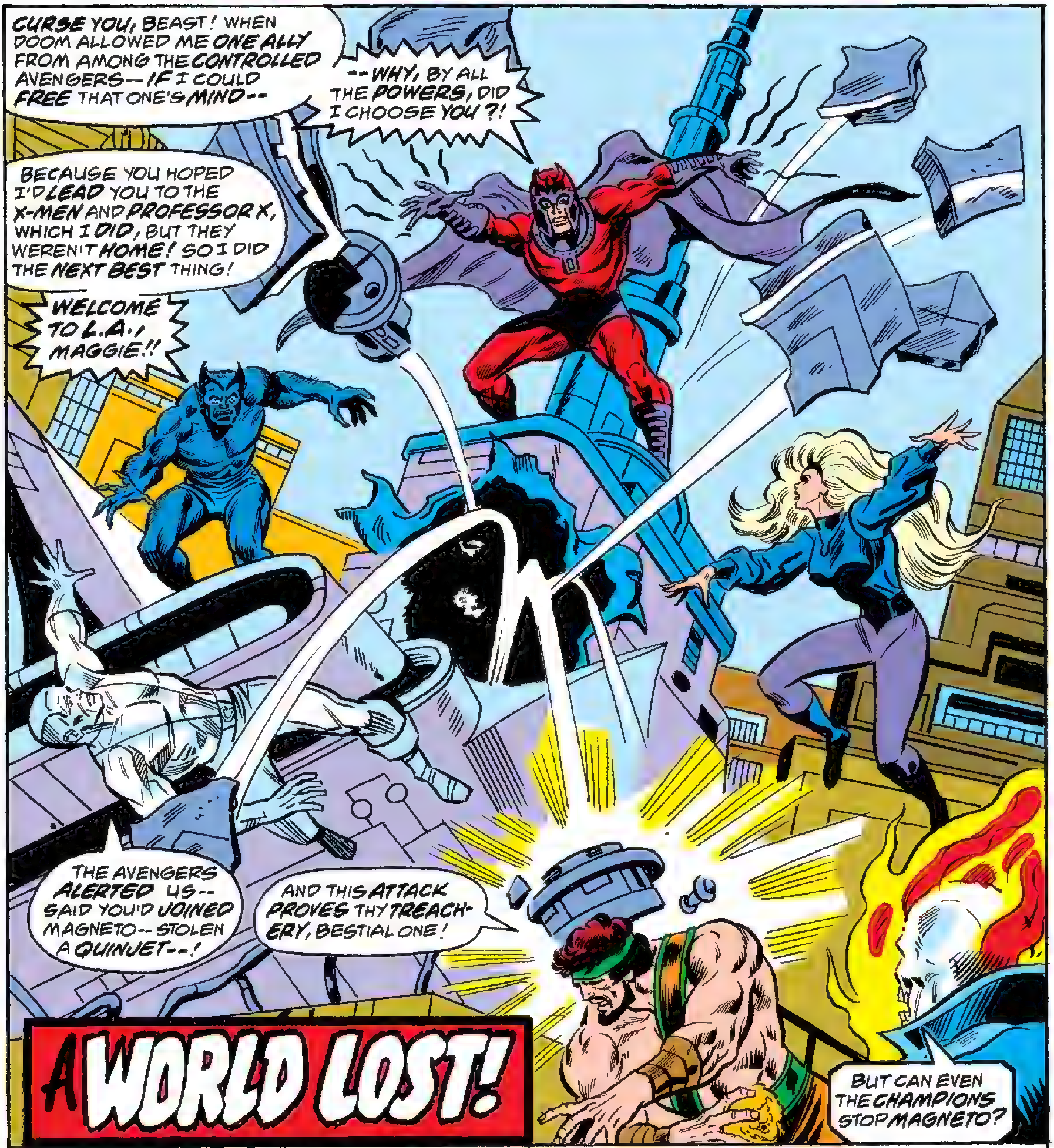
TM
CEASE FIGHTING ME, DOLTS! ONLY I CAN SAVE THE WORLD FROM DR. DOOM!
NAY, MAGNETO! DOOM IS THE MASTER WE DO SERVE!
FEATURING: THE BOMBASTIC BEAST!
PLUS: A SUPER SURPRISE GUEST STAR!
CARNAGE IN THE CAPITAL!

*IN SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #14, WE SAW **DOCTOR DOOM'S ULTIMATE TRIUMPH** -- A **NEURO-GAS** RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE GIVING DOOM **CONTROL** OVER ALL **AIR-BREATHING LIFE** ON EARTH -- A CONTROL NO ONE IS **AWARE** OF UNTIL DOOM **COMMANDS** -- AND THEN ALL **OBEY**! ENTER AN UNWITTING **MAGNETO**, PROPOSING AN **ALLIANCE** WITH THE GOOD DOCTOR, ONLY TO FIND HIMSELF **KNEELING** TO DOOM **INSTEAD**! SEEING POSSIBILITIES FOR **AMUSEMENT** IN **CONFLICT**, DOOM **FREED** MAGNETO'S **MIND** FOR AN UNEQUAL **CONTEST**... WITH A **WORLD** FOR THE **WINNING**!*

STAN LEE *Presents:*

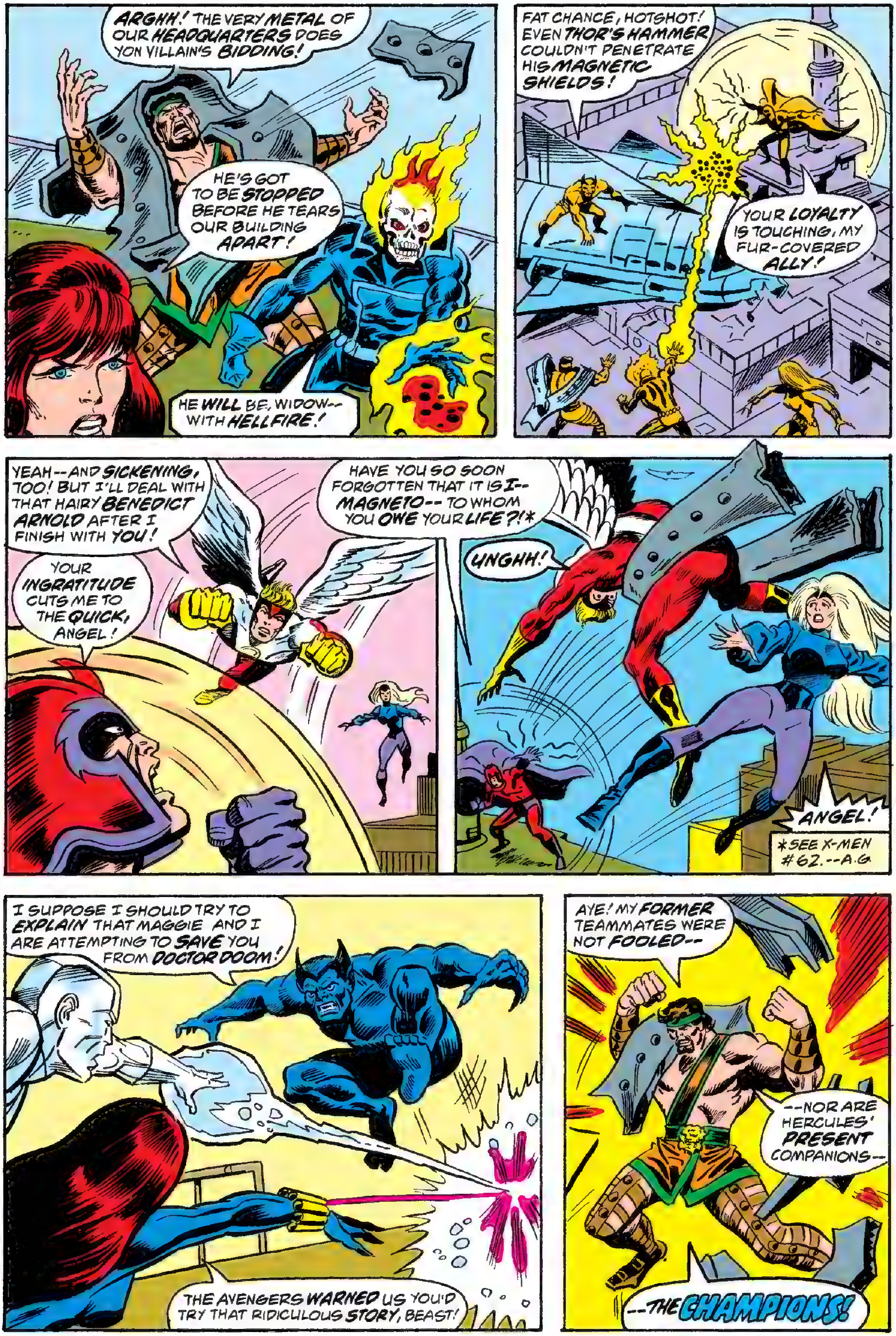
THE CHAMPIONS™

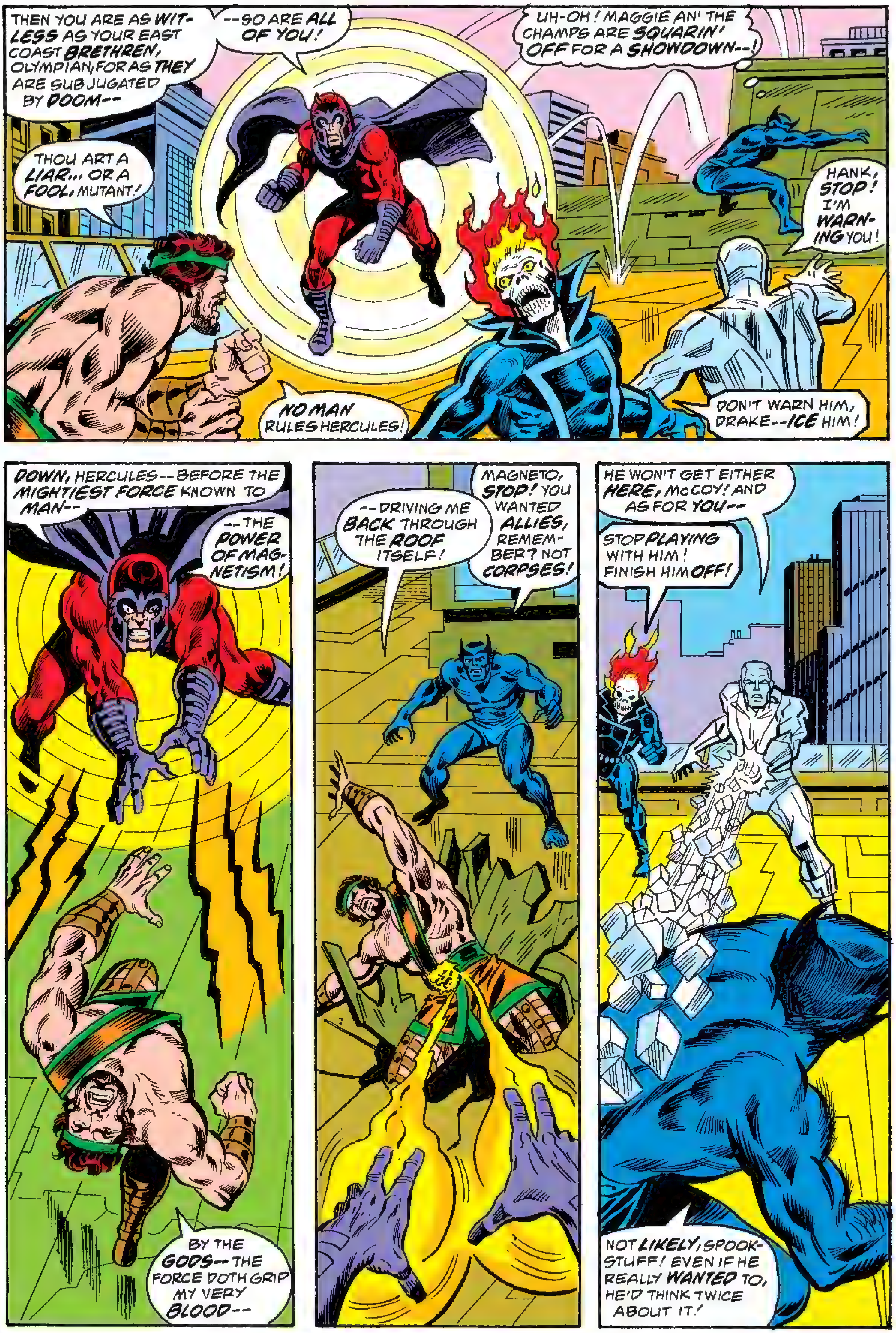


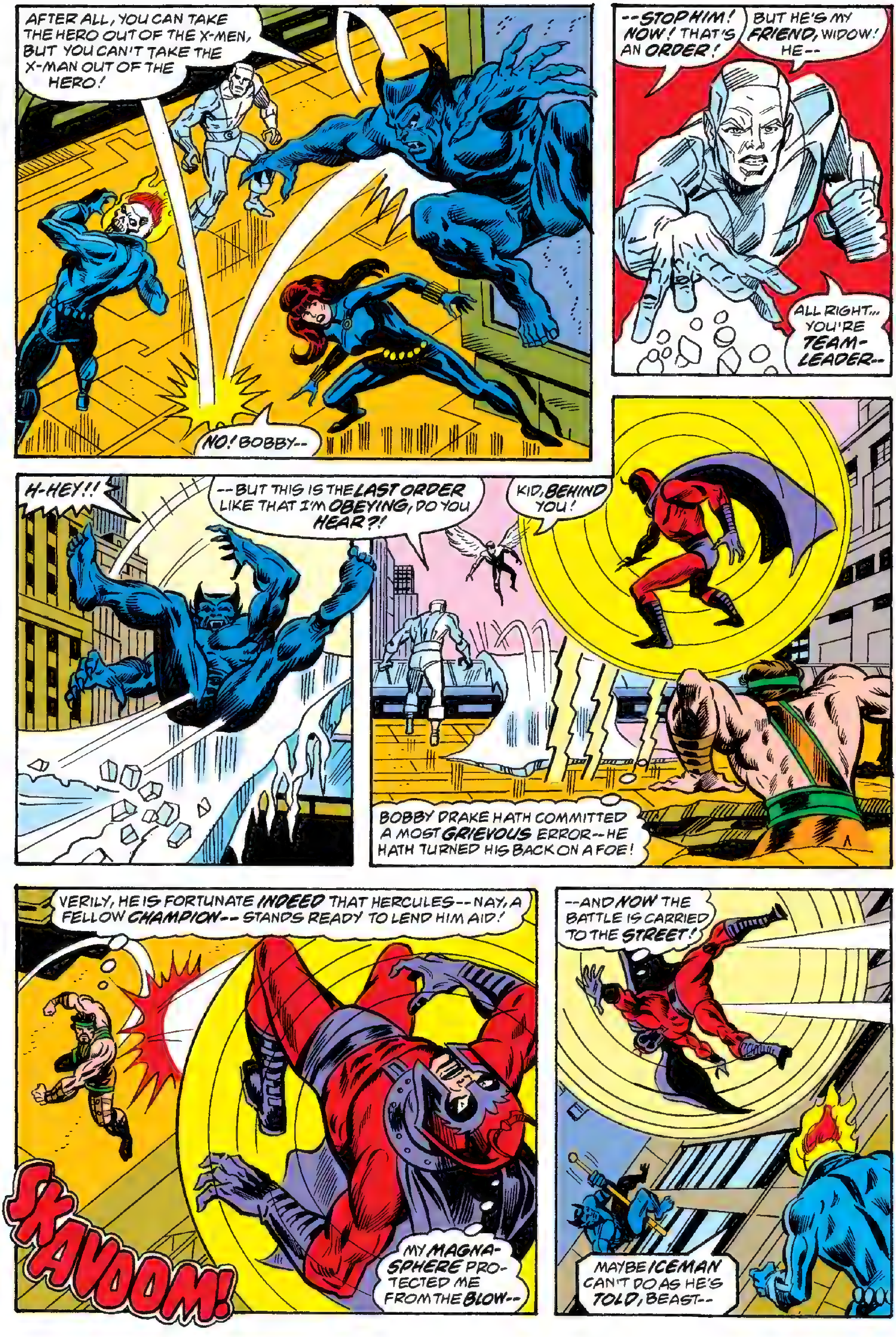
A WORLD LOST!

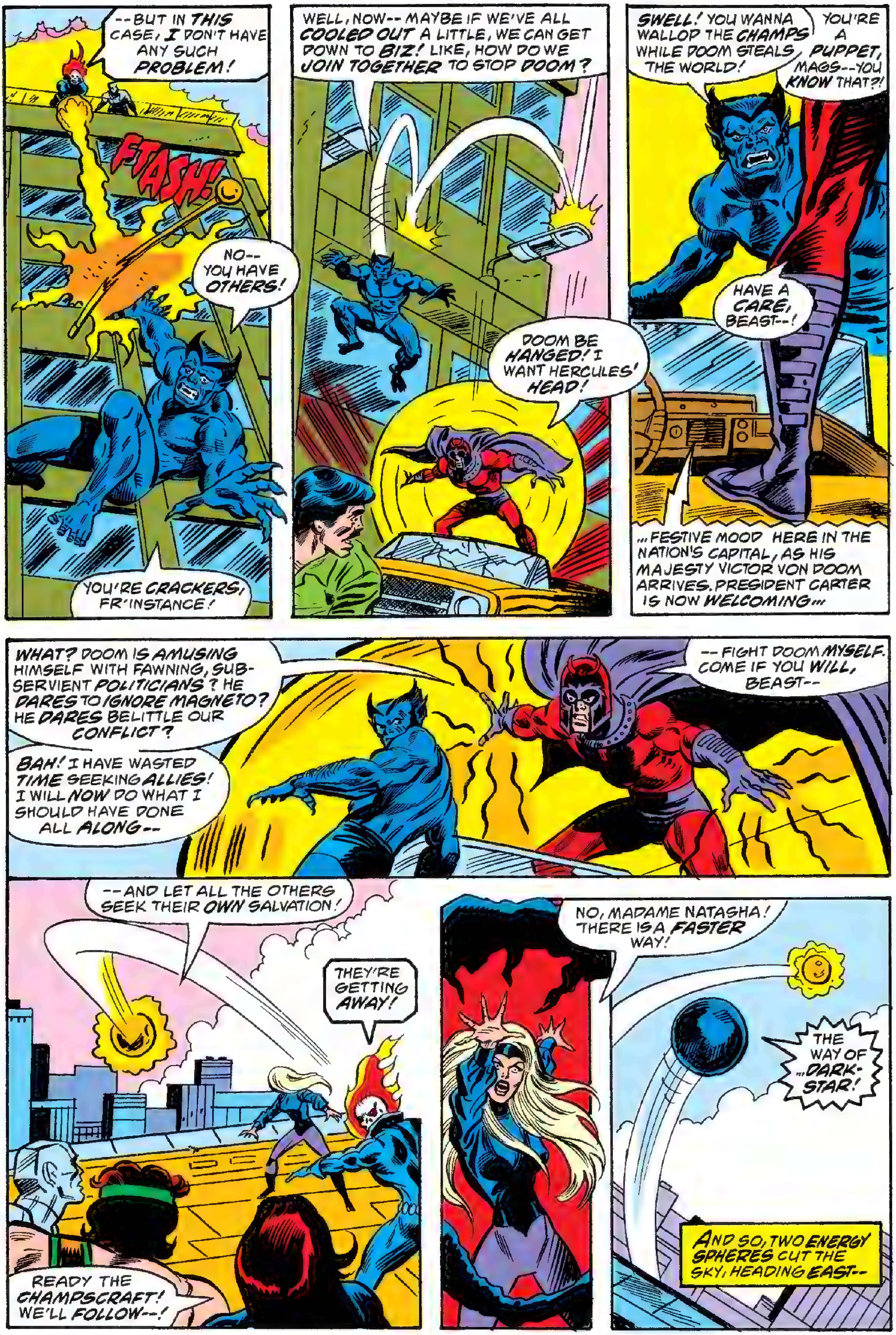
CURSE YOU, BEAST! WHEN DOOM ALLOWED ME ONE ALLY FROM AMONG THE CONTROLLED AVENGERS -- IF I COULD FREE THAT ONE'S MIND --
-- WHY, BY ALL THE POWERS, DID I CHOOSE YOU?!
BECAUSE YOU HOPED I'D LEAD YOU TO THE X-MEN AND PROFESSOR X, WHICH I DID, BUT THEY WEREN'T HOME! SO I DID THE NEXT BEST THING!
WELCOME TO L.A., MAGGIE!!
THE AVENGERS ALERTED US -- SAID YOU'D JOINED MAGNETO -- STOLEN A QUINJET -- !
AND THIS ATTACK PROVES THY TREACHERY, BESTIAL ONE!
BUT CAN EVEN THE CHAMPIONS STOP MAGNETO?

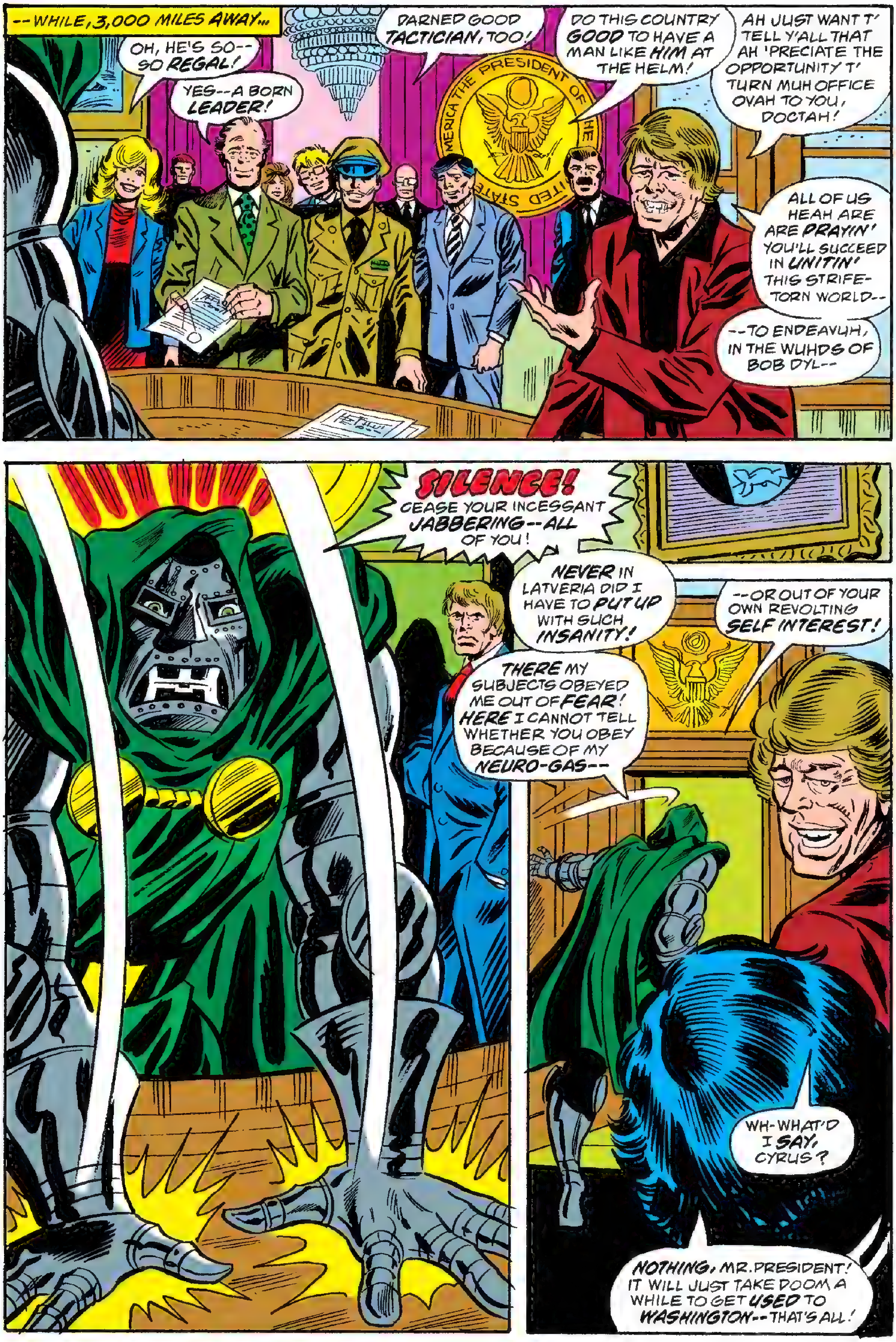
BILL MANTLO WRITER * **BOB HALL** ARTIST * **M. ESPOSITO** INKER * **DENISE WOHL** LETTERER * **PHIL RACHE** COLORIST * **ARCHIE GOODWIN** EDITOR

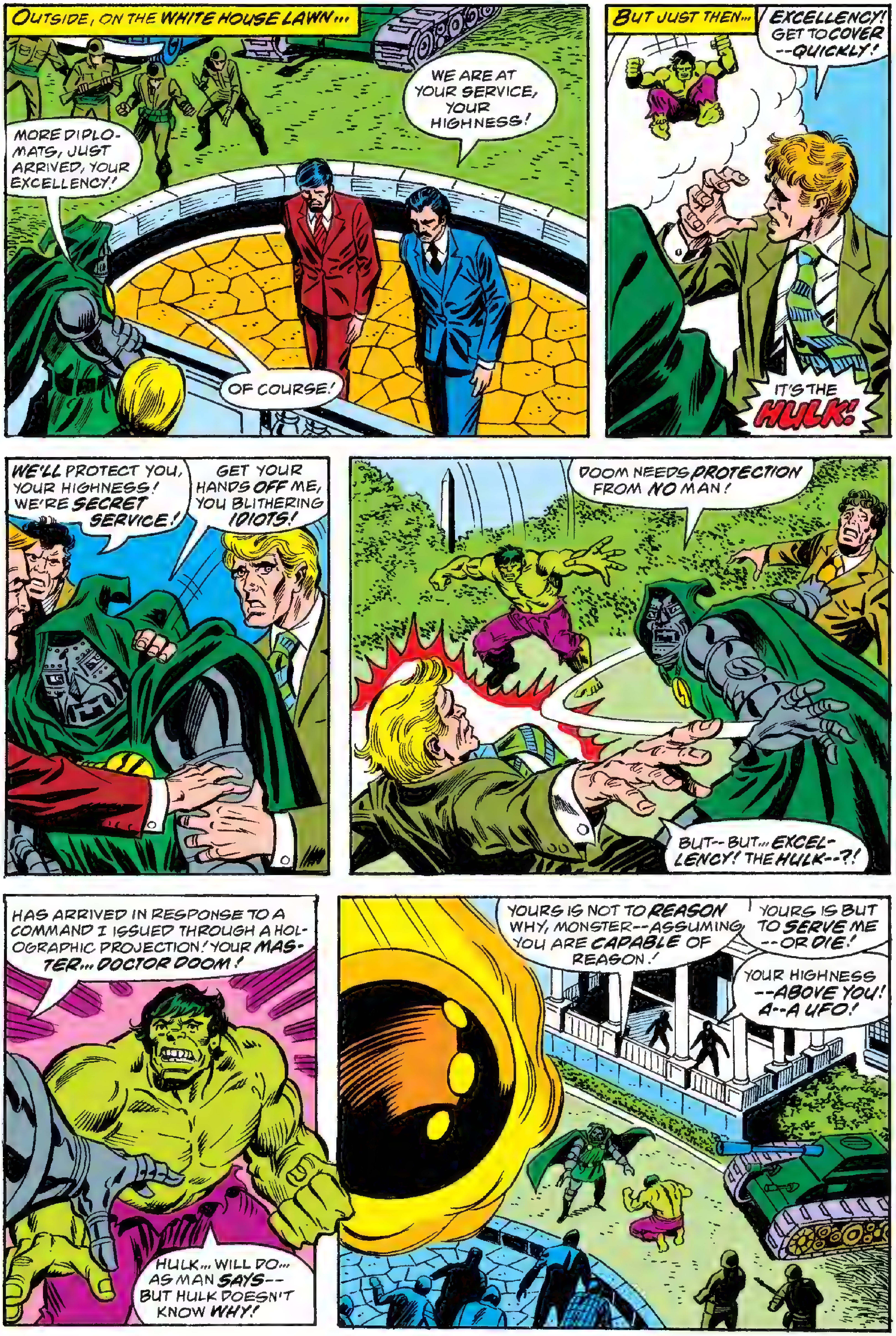

ARGHH! THE VERY METAL OF OUR HEADQUARTERS DOES YON VILLAIN'S BIDDING!
HE'S GOT TO BE STOPPED BEFORE HE TEARS OUR BUILDING APART!
HE WILL BE, WIDOW-- WITH HELLFIRE!
FAT CHANCE, HOTSHOT! EVEN THOR'S HAMMER COULDN'T PENETRATE HIS MAGNETIC SHIELDS!
YOUR LOYALTY IS TOUCHING, MY FUR-COVERED ALLY!
YEAH--AND SICKENING, TOO! BUT I'LL DEAL WITH THAT HAIRY BENEDICT ARNOLD AFTER I FINISH WITH YOU!
YOUR INGRATITUDE CUTS ME TO THE QUICK, ANGEL!
HAVE YOU SO SOON FORGOTTEN THAT IT IS I--MAGNETO--TO WHOM YOU OWE YOUR LIFE?!*
UNGHH!
ANGEL!
*SEE X-MEN #62.--A.G.
I SUPPOSE I SHOULD TRY TO EXPLAIN THAT MAGGIE AND I ARE ATTEMPTING TO SAVE YOU FROM DOCTOR DOOM!
THE AVENGERS WARNED US YOU'D TRY THAT RIDICULOUS STORY, BEAST!
AYE! MY FORMER TEAMMATES WERE NOT FOOLED--
--NOR ARE HERCULES' PRESENT COMPANIONS--
--THE CHAMPIONS!

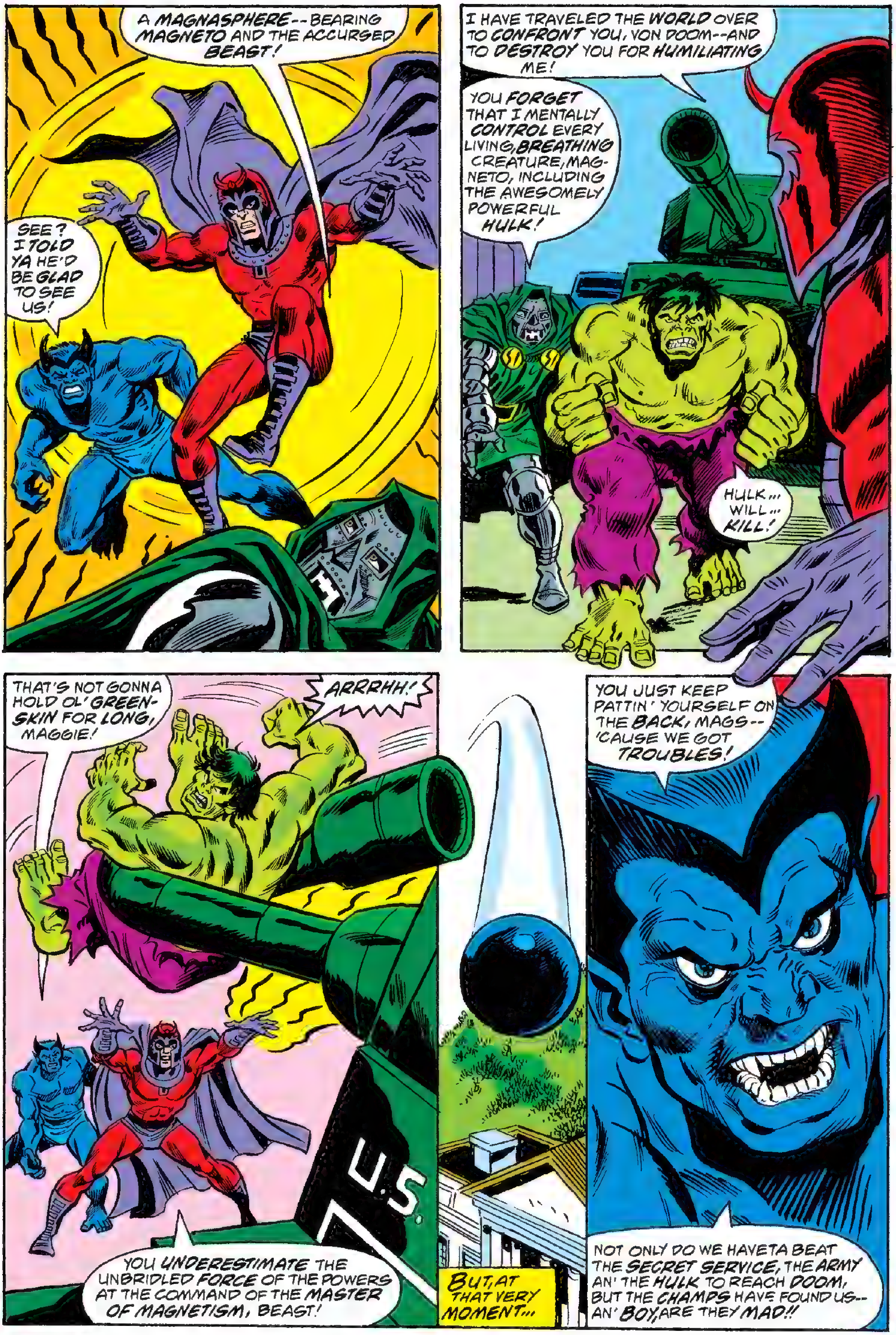

THEN YOU ARE AS WITLESS AS YOUR EAST COAST BRETHREN, OLYMPIAN, FOR AS THEY ARE SUBJUGATED BY DOOM--
--SO ARE ALL OF YOU!
THOU ART A LIAR... OR A FOOL, MUTANT!
UH-OH! MAGGIE AN' THE CHAMPS ARE SQUARIN' OFF FOR A SHOWDOWN--!
HANK, STOP! I'M WARNING YOU!
NO MAN RULES HERCULES!
DON'T WARN HIM, DRAKE--ICE HIM!
DOWN, HERCULES--BEFORE THE MIGHTIEST FORCE KNOWN TO MAN--
--THE POWER OF MAGNETISM!
BY THE GODS--THE FORCE DOTH GRIP MY VERY BLOOD--
--DRIVING ME BACK THROUGH THE ROOF ITSELF!
MAGNETO, STOP! YOU WANTED ALLIES, REMEMBER? NOT CORPSES!
HE WON'T GET EITHER HERE, McCOY! AND AS FOR YOU--
STOP PLAYING WITH HIM! FINISH HIM OFF!
NOT LIKELY, SPOOKSTUFF! EVEN IF HE REALLY WANTED TO, HE'D THINK TWICE ABOUT IT!

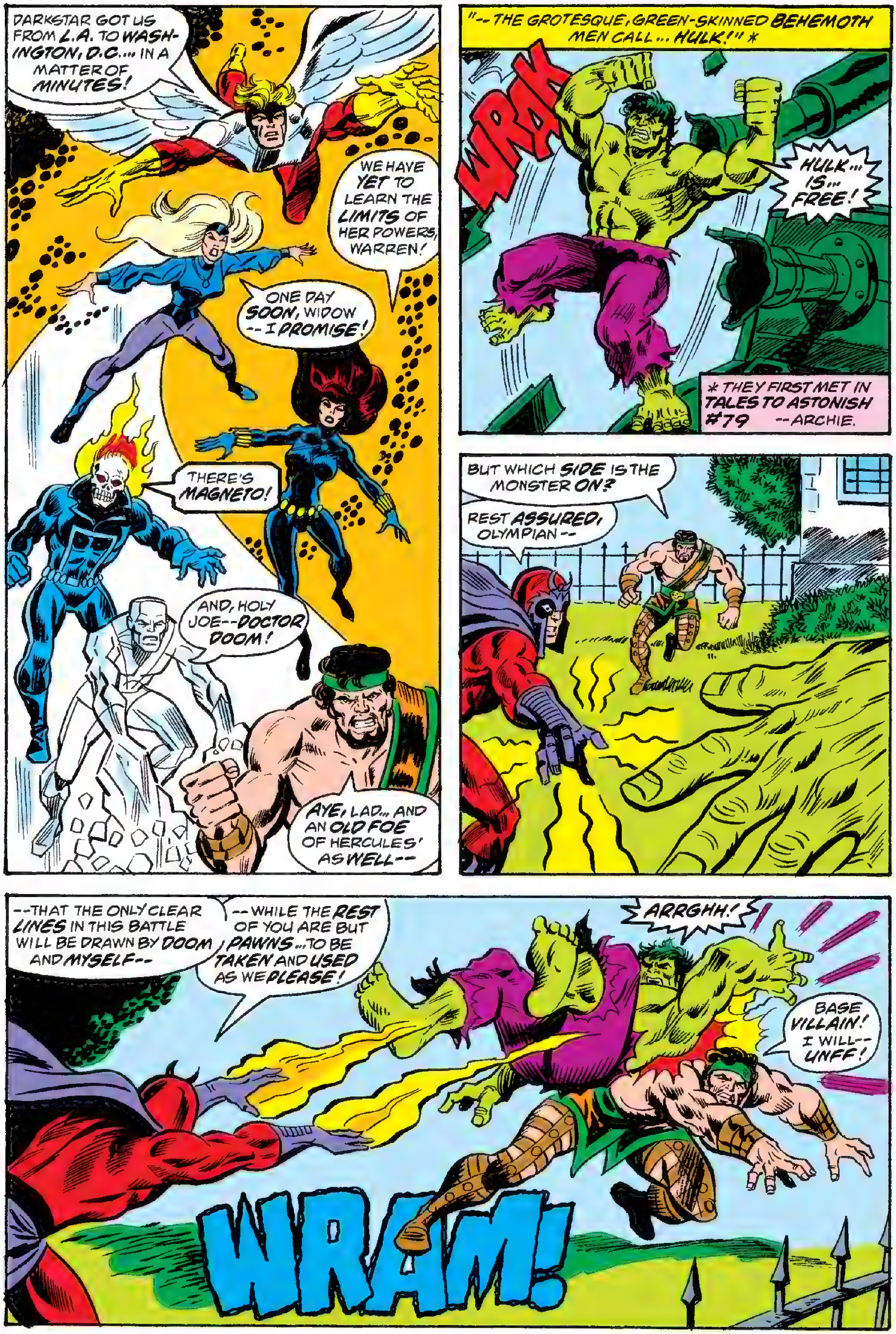

AFTER ALL, YOU CAN TAKE THE HERO OUT OF THE X-MEN, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE THE X-MAN OUT OF THE HERO!
NO! BOBBY--
--STOP HIM! NOW! THAT'S AN ORDER!
BUT HE'S MY FRIEND, WIDOW! HE--
ALL RIGHT... YOU'RE TEAM-LEADER--
H-HEY!!
--BUT THIS IS THE LAST ORDER LIKE THAT I'M OBEYING, DO YOU HEAR?!
KID, BEHIND YOU!
BOBBY DRAKE HATH COMMITTED A MOST GRIEVOUS ERROR--HE HATH TURNED HIS BACK ON A FOE!
VERILY, HE IS FORTUNATE INDEED THAT HERCULES--NAY, A FELLOW CHAMPION--STANDS READY TO LEND HIM AID!
SKAVOOM!
MY MAGNA-SPHERE PROTECTED ME FROM THE BLOW--
--AND NOW THE BATTLE IS CARRIED TO THE STREET!
MAYBE ICEMAN CAN'T DO AS HE'S TOLD, BEAST--

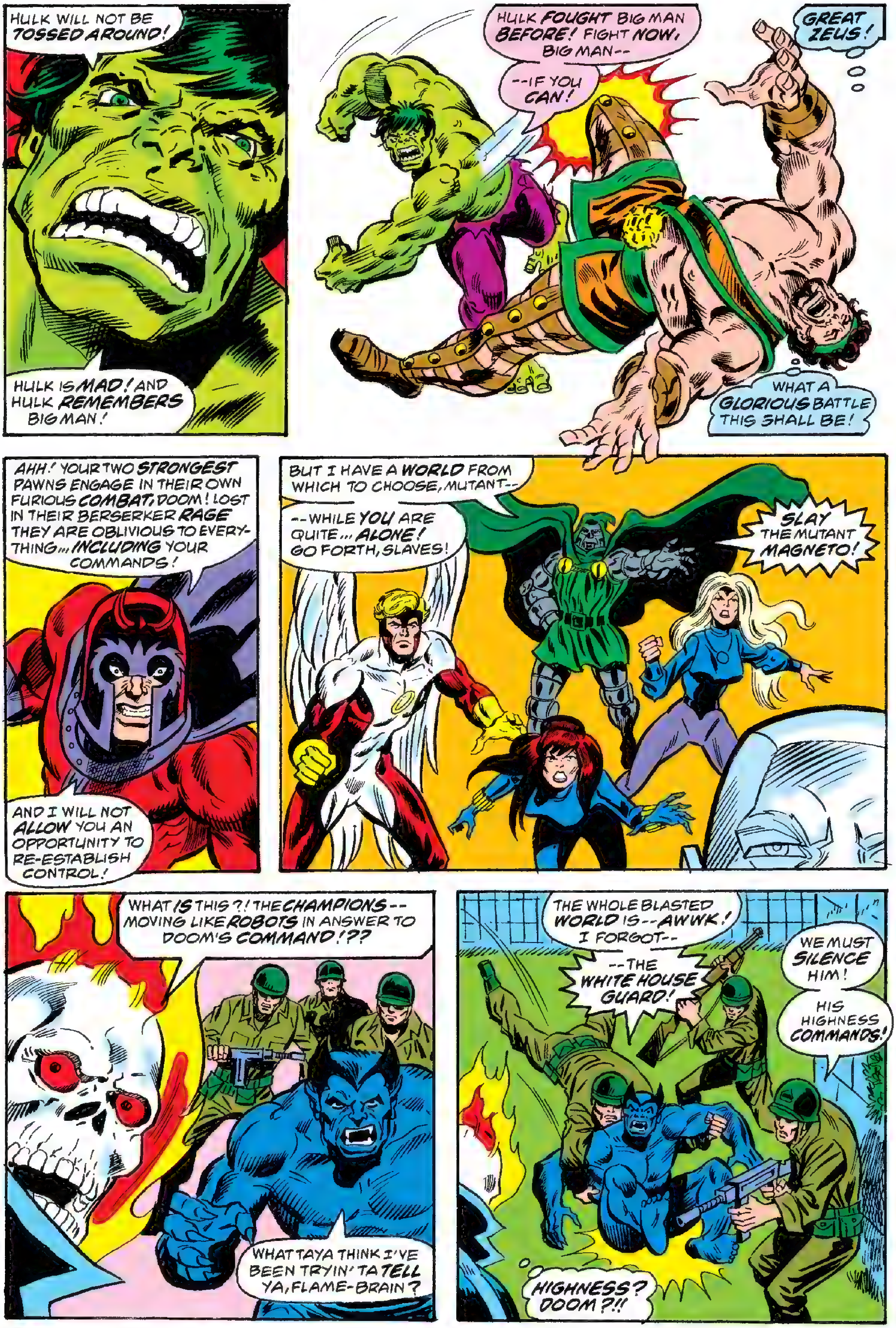

--BUT IN THIS CASE, I DON'T HAVE ANY SUCH PROBLEM!
FTASH!
NO-- YOU HAVE OTHERS!
YOU'RE CRACKERS, FR'INSTANCE!
WELL, NOW-- MAYBE IF WE'VE ALL COOLED OUT A LITTLE, WE CAN GET DOWN TO BIZ! LIKE, HOW DO WE JOIN TOGETHER TO STOP DOOM?
DOOM BE HANGED! I WANT HERCULES' HEAD!
SWELL! YOU WANNA WALLOP THE CHAMPS WHILE DOOM STEALS THE WORLD!
YOU'RE A PUPPET, MAGS--YOU KNOW THAT?!
HAVE A CARE, BEAST--!
...FESTIVE MOOD HERE IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL, AS HIS MAJESTY VICTOR VON DOOM ARRIVES. PRESIDENT CARTER IS NOW WELCOMING...
WHAT? DOOM IS AMUSING HIMSELF WITH FAWNING, SUBSERVIENT POLITICIANS? HE DARES TO IGNORE MAGNETO? HE DARES BELITTLE OUR CONFLICT?
BAH! I HAVE WASTED TIME SEEKING ALLIES! I WILL NOW DO WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE ALL ALONG--
--FIGHT DOOM MYSELF. COME IF YOU WILL, BEAST--
--AND LET ALL THE OTHERS SEEK THEIR OWN SALVATION!
THEY'RE GETTING AWAY!
READY THE CHAMPSCRAFT! WE'LL FOLLOW--!
NO, MADAME NATASHA! THERE IS A FASTER WAY!
THE WAY OF ...DARKSTAR!
AND SO, TWO ENERGY SPHERES CUT THE SKY, HEADING EAST--

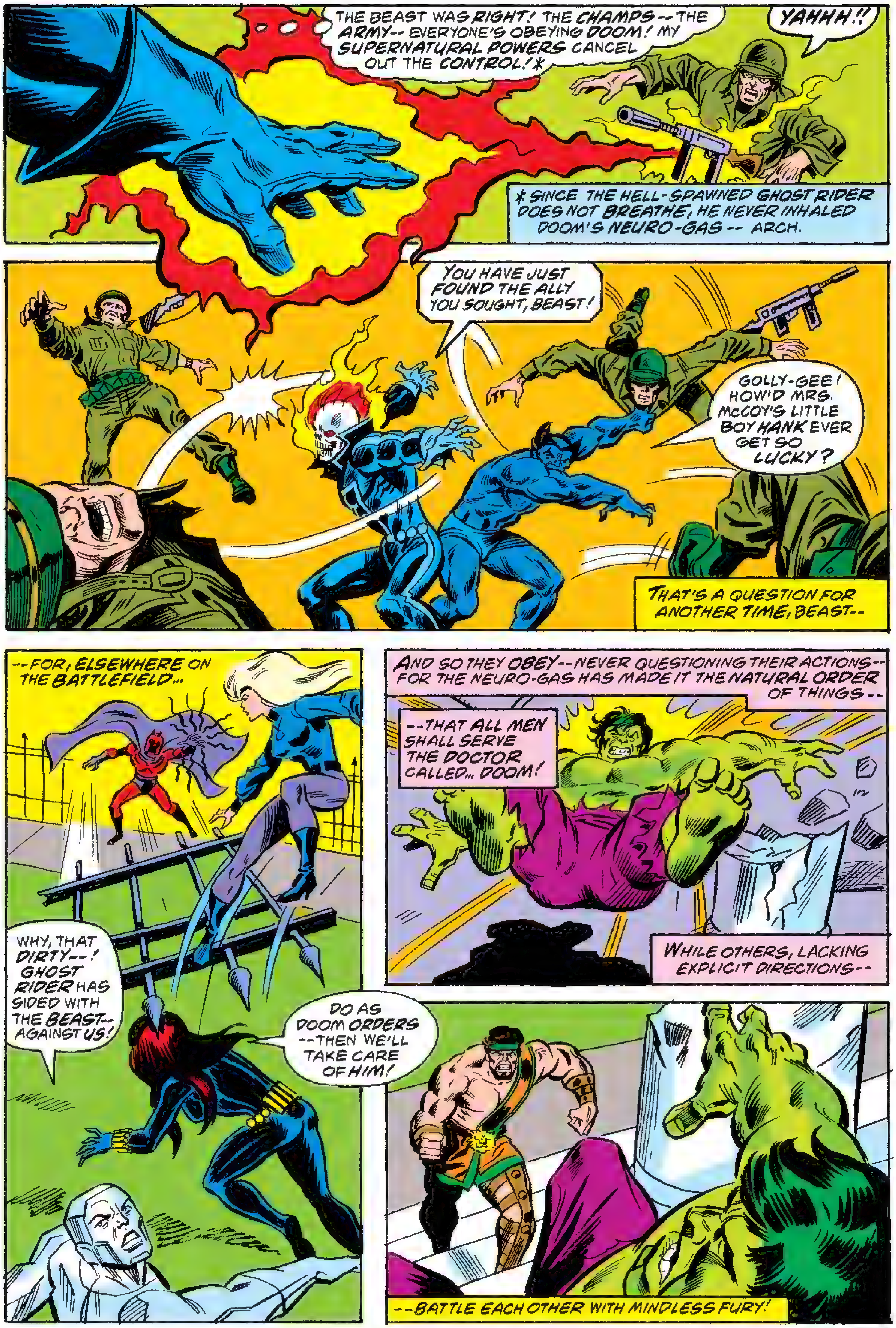

--WHILE, 3,000 MILES AWAY...
OH, HE'S SO--SO REGAL!
YES--A BORN LEADER!
DARNED GOOD TACTICIAN, TOO!
DO THIS COUNTRY GOOD TO HAVE A MAN LIKE HIM AT THE HELM!
AH JUST WANT T' TELL Y'ALL THAT AH 'PRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY T' TURN MUH OFFICE OVAH TO YOU, DOCTAH!
ALL OF US HEAH ARE ARE PRAYIN' YOU'LL SUCCEED IN UNITIN' THIS STRIFE-TORN WORLD--
--TO ENDEAVUH, IN THE WUHDS OF BOB DYL--
SILENCE! CEASE YOUR INCESSANT JABBERING--ALL OF YOU!
NEVER IN LATVERIA DID I HAVE TO PUT UP WITH SUCH INSANITY!
THERE MY SUBJECTS OBEYED ME OUT OF FEAR! HERE I CANNOT TELL WHETHER YOU OBEY BECAUSE OF MY NEURO-GAS--
--OR OUT OF YOUR OWN REVOLTING SELF INTEREST!
WH-WHAT'D I SAY, CYRUS?
NOTHING, MR. PRESIDENT! IT WILL JUST TAKE DOOM A WHILE TO GET USED TO WASHINGTON--THAT'S ALL!

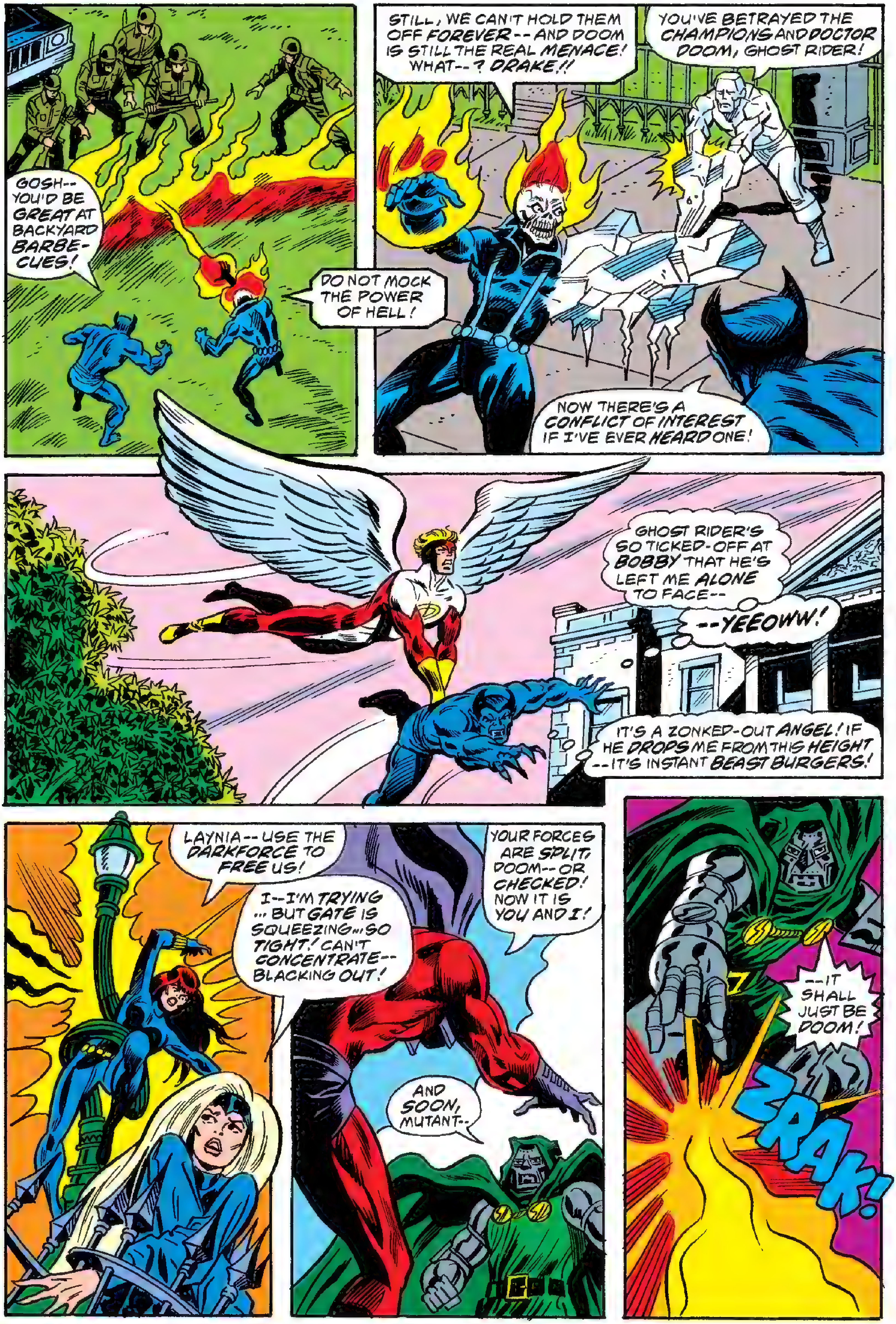

OUTSIDE, ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN...
WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE, YOUR HIGHNESS!
MORE DIPLOMATS, JUST ARRIVED, YOUR EXCELLENCY!
OF COURSE!
BUT JUST THEN...
EXCELLENCY! GET TO COVER--QUICKLY!
IT'S THE HULK!
WE'LL PROTECT YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS! WE'RE SECRET SERVICE!
GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME, YOU BLITHERING IDIOTS!
DOOM NEEDS PROTECTION FROM NO MAN!
BUT--BUT... EXCELLENCY! THE HULK--?!
HAS ARRIVED IN RESPONSE TO A COMMAND I ISSUED THROUGH A HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION! YOUR MASTER... DOCTOR DOOM!
HULK... WILL DO... AS MAN SAYS--BUT HULK DOESN'T KNOW WHY!
YOURS IS NOT TO REASON WHY, MONSTER--ASSUMING YOU ARE CAPABLE OF REASON!
YOURS IS BUT TO SERVE ME--OR DIE!
YOUR HIGHNESS--ABOVE YOU! A--A UFO!

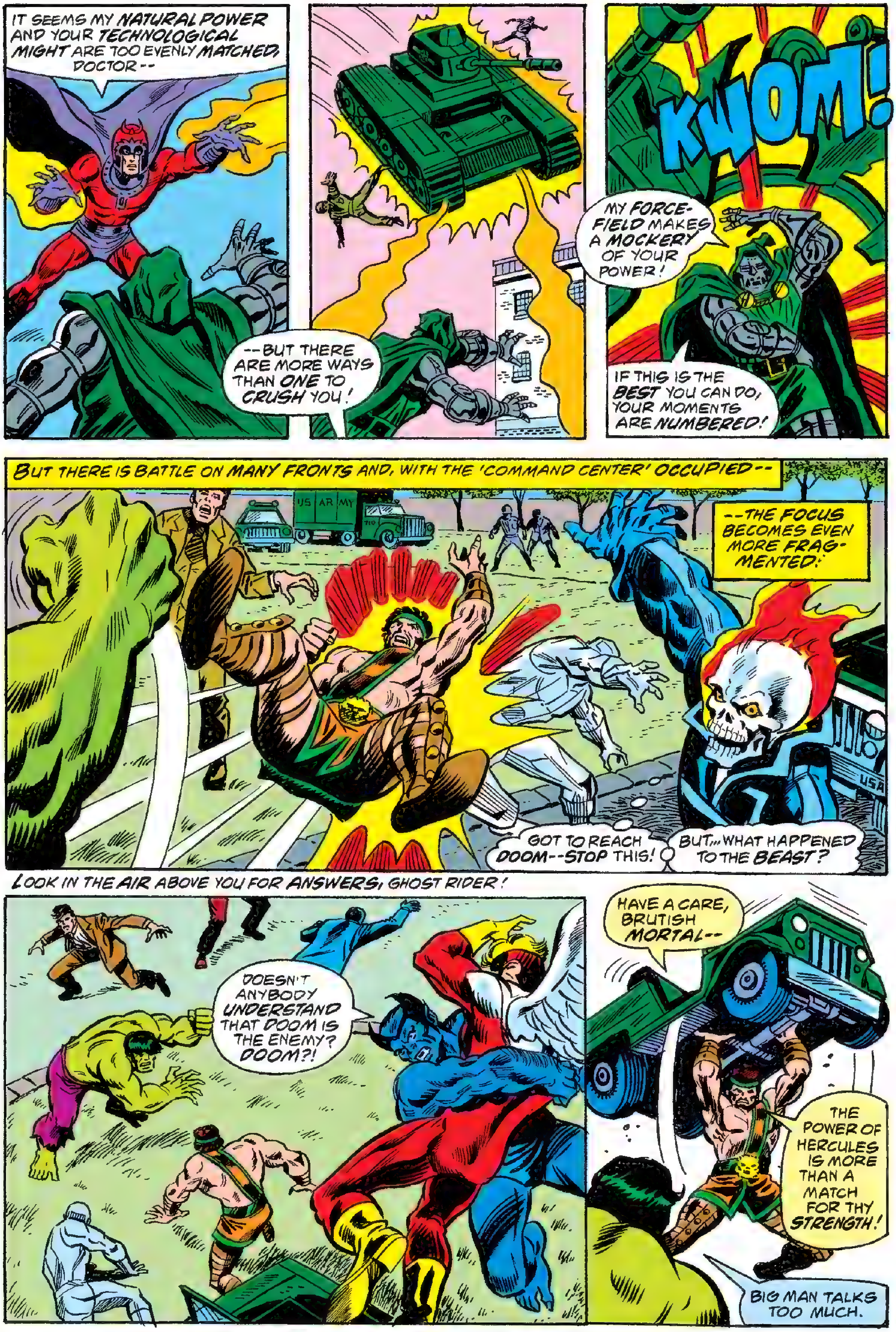

A MAGNASPHERE--BEARING MAGNETO AND THE ACCURSED BEAST!
SEE? I TOLD YA HE'D BE GLAD TO SEE US!
I HAVE TRAVELED THE WORLD OVER TO CONFRONT YOU, VON DOOM--AND TO DESTROY YOU FOR HUMILIATING ME!
YOU FORGET THAT I MENTALLY CONTROL EVERY LIVING, BREATHING CREATURE, MAGNETO, INCLUDING THE AWESOMELY POWERFUL HULK!
HULK... WILL... KILL!
THAT'S NOT GONNA HOLD OL' GREEN-SKIN FOR LONG, MAGGIE!
ARRRHH!
U.S.
YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE UNBRIDLED FORCE OF THE POWERS AT THE COMMAND OF THE MASTER OF MAGNETISM, BEAST!
BUT, AT THAT VERY MOMENT...
YOU JUST KEEP PATTIN' YOURSELF ON THE BACK, MAGS--'CAUSE WE GOT TROUBLES!
NOT ONLY DO WE HAVETA BEAT THE SECRET SERVICE, THE ARMY AN' THE HULK TO REACH DOOM, BUT THE CHAMPS HAVE FOUND US--AN' BOY, ARE THEY MAD!!

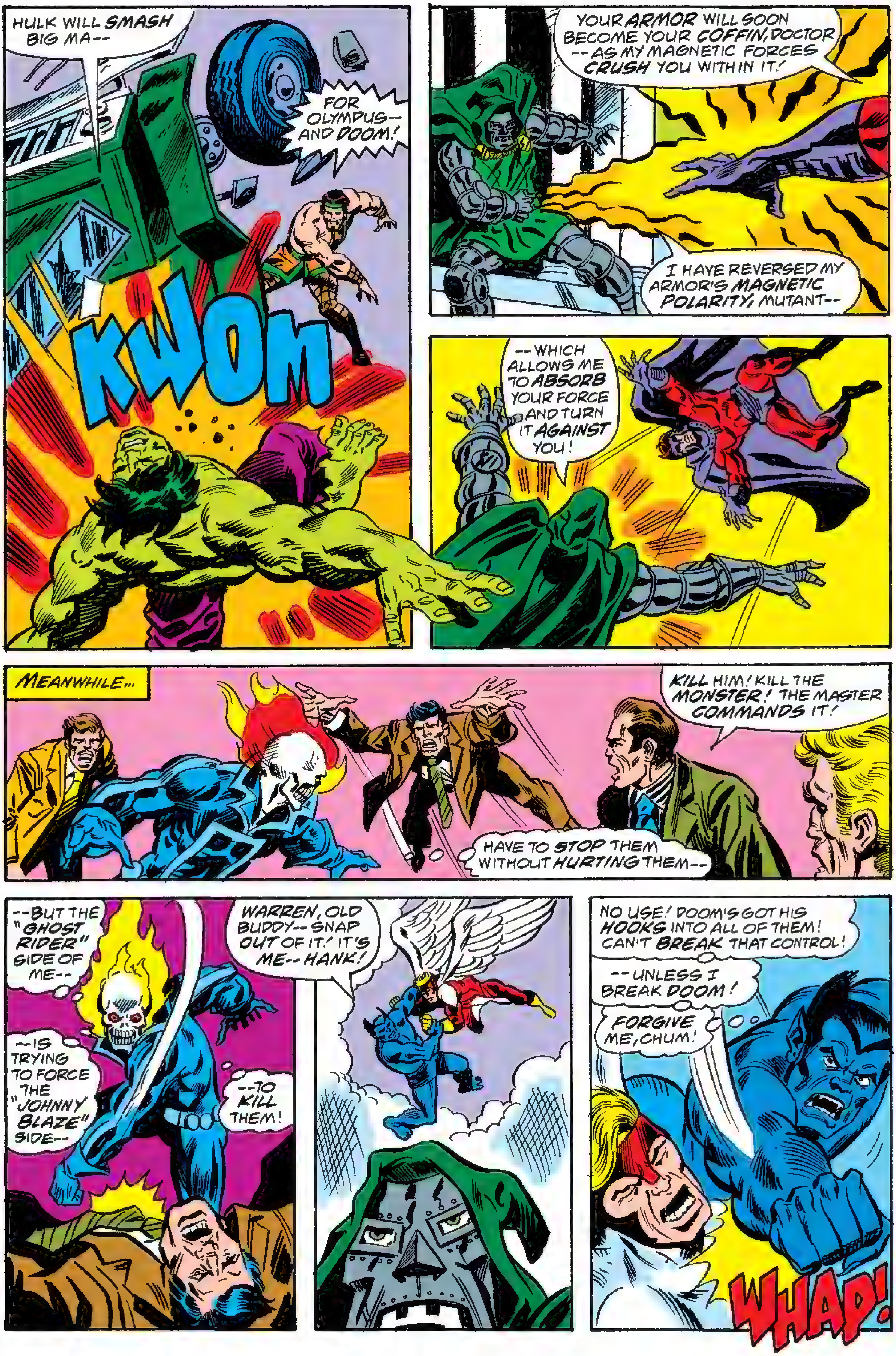

DARKSTAR GOT US FROM L.A. TO WASHINGTON, D.C.... IN A MATTER OF MINUTES!
WE HAVE YET TO LEARN THE LIMITS OF HER POWERS, WARREN!
ONE DAY SOON, WIDOW --I PROMISE!
THERE'S MAGNETO!
AND, HOLY JOE--DOCTOR DOOM!
AYE, LAD... AND AN OLD FOE OF HERCULES' AS WELL--
"--THE GROTESQUE, GREEN-SKINNED BEHEMOTH MEN CALL... HULK!" *
WRAK
HULK... IS... FREE!
* THEY FIRST MET IN TALES TO ASTONISH #79 --ARCHIE.
BUT WHICH SIDE IS THE MONSTER ON?
REST ASSURED, OLYMPIAN --
--THAT THE ONLY CLEAR LINES IN THIS BATTLE WILL BE DRAWN BY DOOM AND MYSELF--
--WHILE THE REST OF YOU ARE BUT PAWNS... TO BE TAKEN AND USED AS WE PLEASE!
ARRGHH!
BASE VILLAIN! I WILL-- UNFF!
WRAM!

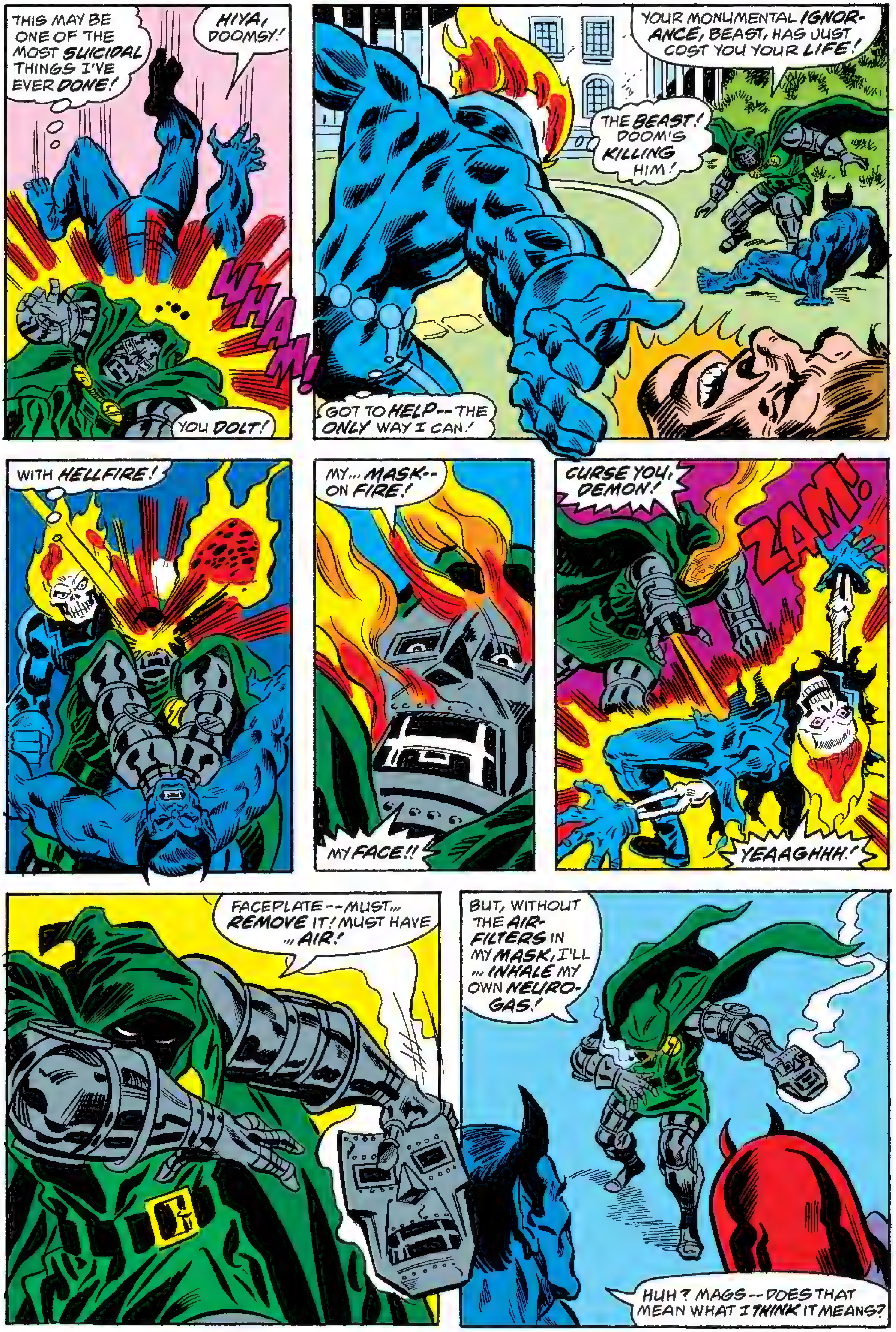

HULK WILL NOT BE TOSSED AROUND!
HULK IS MAD! AND HULK REMEMBERS BIG MAN!
HULK FOUGHT BIG MAN BEFORE! FIGHT NOW, BIG MAN--
--IF YOU CAN!
GREAT ZEUS!
WHAT A GLORIOUS BATTLE THIS SHALL BE!
AHH! YOUR TWO STRONGEST PAWNS ENGAGE IN THEIR OWN FURIOUS COMBAT, DOOM! LOST IN THEIR BERSERKER RAGE THEY ARE OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING... INCLUDING YOUR COMMANDS!
AND I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO RE-ESTABLISH CONTROL!
BUT I HAVE A WORLD FROM WHICH TO CHOOSE, MUTANT--
--WHILE YOU ARE QUITE... ALONE! GO FORTH, SLAVES!
SLAY THE MUTANT MAGNETO!
WHAT IS THIS?! THE CHAMPIONS--MOVING LIKE ROBOTS IN ANSWER TO DOOM'S COMMAND!??
WHAT TAYA THINK I'VE BEEN TRYIN' TA TELL YA, FLAME-BRAIN?
THE WHOLE BLASTED WORLD IS--AWWK! I FORGOT--
--THE WHITE HOUSE GUARD!
WE MUST SILENCE HIM!
HIS HIGHNESS COMMANDS!
HIGHNESS? DOOM?!!

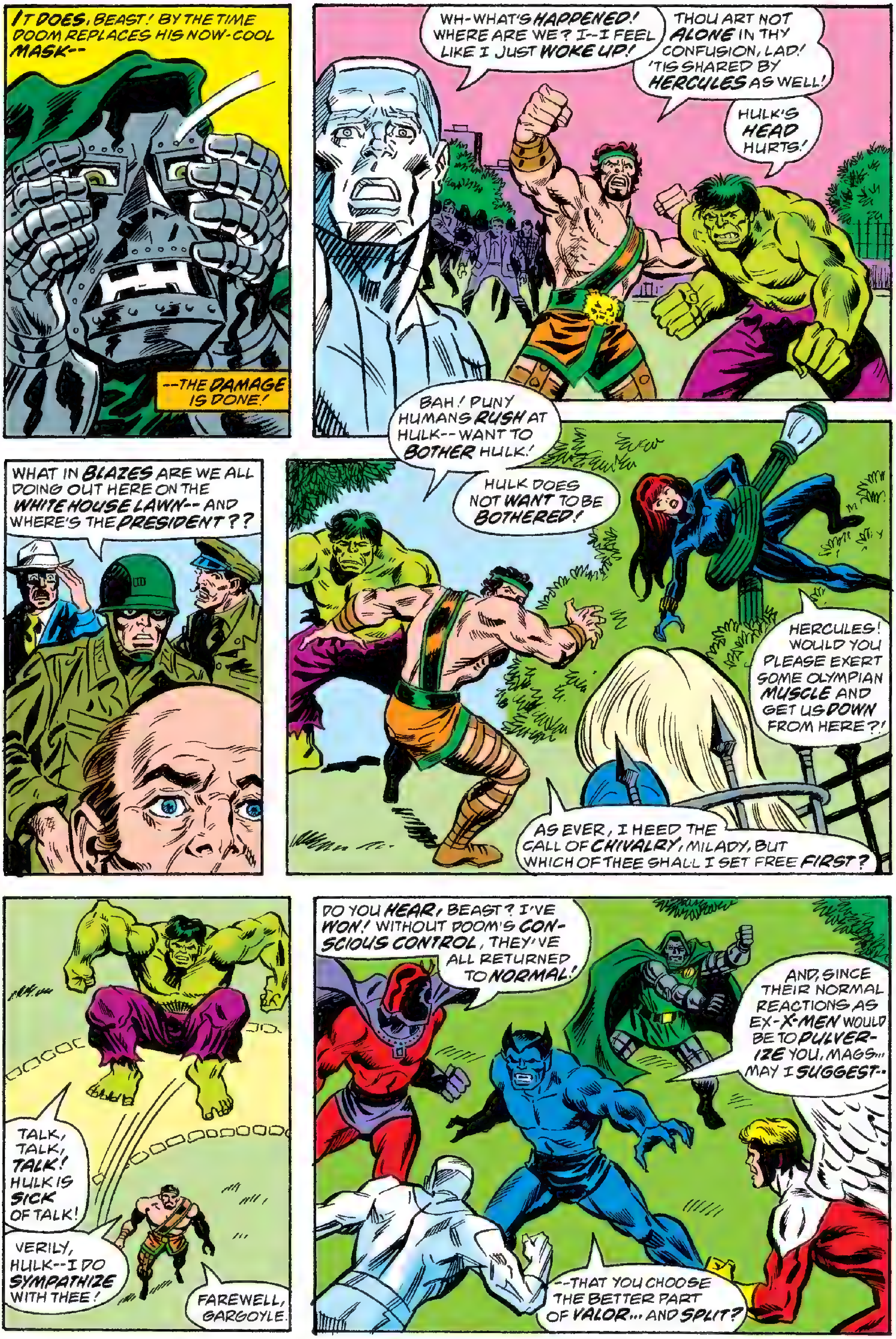

THE BEAST WAS RIGHT! THE CHAMPS--THE ARMY-- EVERYONE'S OBEYING DOOM! MY SUPERNATURAL POWERS CANCEL OUT THE CONTROL!*
YAHHH!!
*SINCE THE HELL-SPAWNED GHOST RIDER DOES NOT BREATHE, HE NEVER INHALED DOOM'S NEURO-GAS -- ARCH.
YOU HAVE JUST FOUND THE ALLY YOU SOUGHT, BEAST!
GOLLY-GEE! HOW'D MRS. McCOY'S LITTLE BOY HANK EVER GET SO LUCKY?
THAT'S A QUESTION FOR ANOTHER TIME, BEAST--
--FOR, ELSEWHERE ON THE BATTLEFIELD...
WHY, THAT DIRTY--! GHOST RIDER HAS SIDED WITH THE BEAST-- AGAINST US!
DO AS DOOM ORDERS --THEN WE'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM!
AND SO THEY OBEY--NEVER QUESTIONING THEIR ACTIONS--FOR THE NEURO-GAS HAS MADE IT THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS--
--THAT ALL MEN SHALL SERVE THE DOCTOR CALLED... DOOM!
WHILE OTHERS, LACKING EXPLICIT DIRECTIONS--
--BATTLE EACH OTHER WITH MINDLESS FURY!

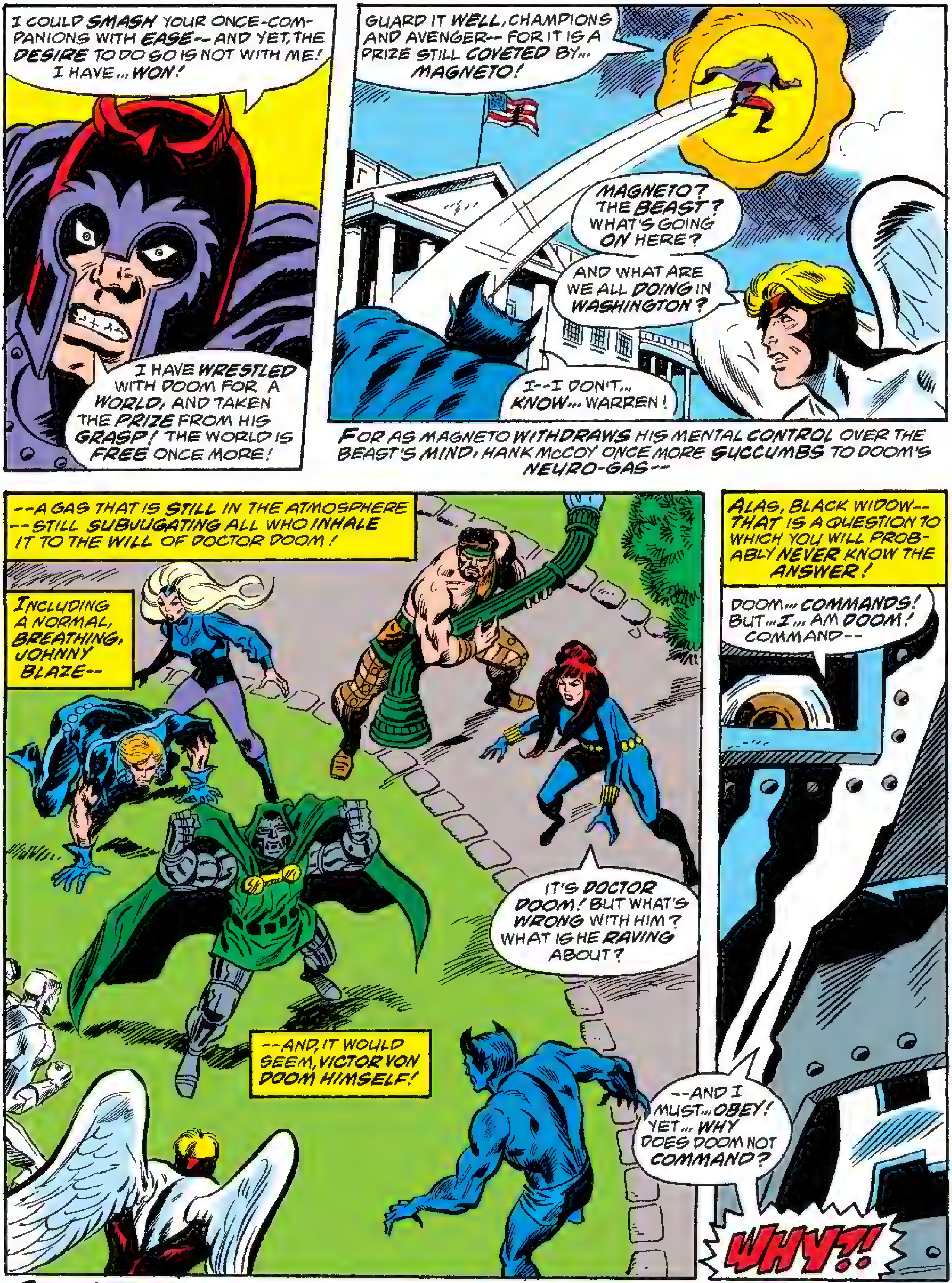

GOSH-- YOU'D BE GREAT AT BACKYARD BARBE-CUES!
DO NOT MOCK THE POWER OF HELL!
STILL, WE CAN'T HOLD THEM OFF FOREVER-- AND DOOM IS STILL THE REAL MENACE! WHAT--? DRAKE!!
YOU'VE BETRAYED THE CHAMPIONS AND DOCTOR DOOM, GHOST RIDER!
NOW THERE'S A CONFLICT OF INTEREST IF I'VE EVER HEARD ONE!
GHOST RIDER'S SO TICKED-OFF AT BOBBY THAT HE'S LEFT ME ALONE TO FACE--
--YEEOWW!
IT'S A ZONKED-OUT ANGEL! IF HE DROPS ME FROM THIS HEIGHT --IT'S INSTANT BEAST BURGERS!
LAYNIA-- USE THE DARKFORCE TO FREE US!
I--I'M TRYING ... BUT GATE IS SQUEEZING... SO TIGHT! CAN'T CONCENTRATE-- BLACKING OUT!
YOUR FORCES ARE SPLIT, DOOM-- OR CHECKED! NOW IT IS YOU AND I!
AND SOON, MUTANT--
--IT SHALL JUST BE DOOM!
ZRAK!


IT SEEMS MY NATURAL POWER AND YOUR TECHNOLOGICAL MIGHT ARE TOO EVENLY MATCHED, DOCTOR--
--BUT THERE ARE MORE WAYS THAN ONE TO CRUSH YOU!
KWOM!
MY FORCE-FIELD MAKES A MOCKERY OF YOUR POWER!
IF THIS IS THE BEST YOU CAN DO, YOUR MOMENTS ARE NUMBERED!
BUT THERE IS BATTLE ON MANY FRONTS AND, WITH THE 'COMMAND CENTER' OCCUPIED--
US ARMY
--THE FOCUS BECOMES EVEN MORE FRAGMENTED:
USA
GOT TO REACH DOOM--STOP THIS!
BUT... WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BEAST?
LOOK IN THE AIR ABOVE YOU FOR ANSWERS, GHOST RIDER!
DOESN'T ANYBODY UNDERSTAND THAT DOOM IS THE ENEMY? DOOM?!
HAVE A CARE, BRUTISH MORTAL--
THE POWER OF HERCULES IS MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THY STRENGTH!
BIG MAN TALKS TOO MUCH.


HULK WILL SMASH BIG MA--
FOR OLYMPUS-- AND DOOM!
KWOM
YOUR ARMOR WILL SOON BECOME YOUR COFFIN, DOCTOR --AS MY MAGNETIC FORCES CRUSH YOU WITHIN IT!
I HAVE REVERSED MY ARMOR'S MAGNETIC POLARITY, MUTANT--
--WHICH ALLOWS ME TO ABSORB YOUR FORCE AND TURN IT AGAINST YOU!
MEANWHILE...
KILL HIM! KILL THE MONSTER! THE MASTER COMMANDS IT!
HAVE TO STOP THEM WITHOUT HURTING THEM--
--BUT THE "GHOST RIDER" SIDE OF ME--
--IS TRYING TO FORCE THE "JOHNNY BLAZE" SIDE--
--TO KILL THEM!
WARREN, OLD BUDDY-- SNAP OUT OF IT! IT'S ME-- HANK!
NO USE! DOOM'S GOT HIS HOOKS INTO ALL OF THEM! CAN'T BREAK THAT CONTROL!
--UNLESS I BREAK DOOM!
FORGIVE ME, CHUM!
WHAP!


THIS MAY BE ONE OF THE MOST SUICIDAL THINGS I'VE EVER DONE!
HIYA, DOOMSY!
WHAM!
YOU DOLT!
YOUR MONUMENTAL IGNORANCE, BEAST, HAS JUST COST YOU YOUR LIFE!
THE BEAST! DOOM'S KILLING HIM!
GOT TO HELP-- THE ONLY WAY I CAN!
WITH HELLFIRE!
MY... MASK-- ON FIRE!
MY FACE!!
CURSE YOU, DEMON!
ZAM!
YEAAGHHH!
FACEPLATE --MUST... REMOVE IT! MUST HAVE ...AIR!
BUT, WITHOUT THE AIR-FILTERS IN MY MASK, I'LL ...INHALE MY OWN NEURO-GAS!
HUH? MAGS--DOES THAT MEAN WHAT I THINK IT MEANS?


IT DOES, BEAST! BY THE TIME DOOM REPLACES HIS NOW-COOL MASK--
--THE DAMAGE IS DONE!
WH-WHAT'S HAPPENED! WHERE ARE WE? I--I FEEL LIKE I JUST WOKE UP!
THOU ART NOT ALONE IN THY CONFUSION, LAD! 'TIS SHARED BY HERCULES AS WELL!
HULK'S HEAD HURTS!
WHAT IN BLAZES ARE WE ALL DOING OUT HERE ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN-- AND WHERE'S THE PRESIDENT??
BAH! PUNY HUMANS RUSH AT HULK-- WANT TO BOTHER HULK!
HULK DOES NOT WANT TO BE BOTHERED!
HERCULES! WOULD YOU PLEASE EXERT SOME OLYMPIAN MUSCLE AND GET US DOWN FROM HERE?!
AS EVER, I HEED THE CALL OF CHIVALRY, MILADY, BUT WHICH OF THEE SHALL I SET FREE FIRST?
TALK, TALK, TALK! HULK IS SICK OF TALK!
VERILY, HULK--I DO SYMPATHIZE WITH THEE!
FAREWELL, GARGOYLE.
DO YOU HEAR, BEAST? I'VE WON! WITHOUT DOOM'S CONSCIOUS CONTROL, THEY'VE ALL RETURNED TO NORMAL!
AND, SINCE THEIR NORMAL REACTIONS AS EX-X-MEN WOULD BE TO PULVERIZE YOU, MAGS... MAY I SUGGEST--
--THAT YOU CHOOSE THE BETTER PART OF VALOR... AND SPLIT?


I COULD SMASH YOUR ONCE-COMPANIONS WITH EASE-- AND YET, THE DESIRE TO DO SO IS NOT WITH ME! I HAVE... WON!
I HAVE WRESTLED WITH DOOM FOR A WORLD, AND TAKEN THE PRIZE FROM HIS GRASP! THE WORLD IS FREE ONCE MORE!
GUARD IT WELL, CHAMPIONS AND AVENGER-- FOR IT IS A PRIZE STILL COVETED BY... MAGNETO!
MAGNETO? THE BEAST? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
AND WHAT ARE WE ALL DOING IN WASHINGTON?
I--I DON'T... KNOW... WARREN!
FOR AS MAGNETO WITHDRAWS HIS MENTAL CONTROL OVER THE BEAST'S MIND, HANK McCOY ONCE MORE SUCCUMBS TO DOOM'S NEURO-GAS--
--A GAS THAT IS STILL IN THE ATMOSPHERE --STILL SUBJUGATING ALL WHO INHALE IT TO THE WILL OF DOCTOR DOOM!
INCLUDING A NORMAL, BREATHING, JOHNNY BLAZE--
IT'S DOCTOR DOOM! BUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM? WHAT IS HE RAVING ABOUT?
--AND, IT WOULD SEEM, VICTOR VON DOOM HIMSELF!
ALAS, BLACK WIDOW-- THAT IS A QUESTION TO WHICH YOU WILL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW THE ANSWER!
DOOM... COMMANDS! BUT... I... AM DOOM! COMMAND--
--AND I MUST... OBEY! YET... WHY DOES DOOM NOT COMMAND?
WHY?!

GAZE UPON A MAN WHO RULES A WORLD... AND YET WHO IS INCAPABLE OF RULING HIMSELF!

NEXT ISSUE: A GUEST-ARTIST! THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS (WELL, SOME, ANYWAY)! AND...

THE SENTINELS SURVIVE! *Plus* A SURPRISE MYSTERY-VILLAIN!

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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
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TM
THE SENTINELS ARE ATTACKING AND IT'S...
...THE CHAMPIONS' LAST STAND!
ERNIE CHAN 1977

The avenging ANGEL! The deadly BLACK WIDOW! Johnny Blaze, the GHOST RIDER! HERCULES, Prince of Power! The incomparable ICEMAN! Five fighters for justice united to battle for the common man...because the world still needs heroes!

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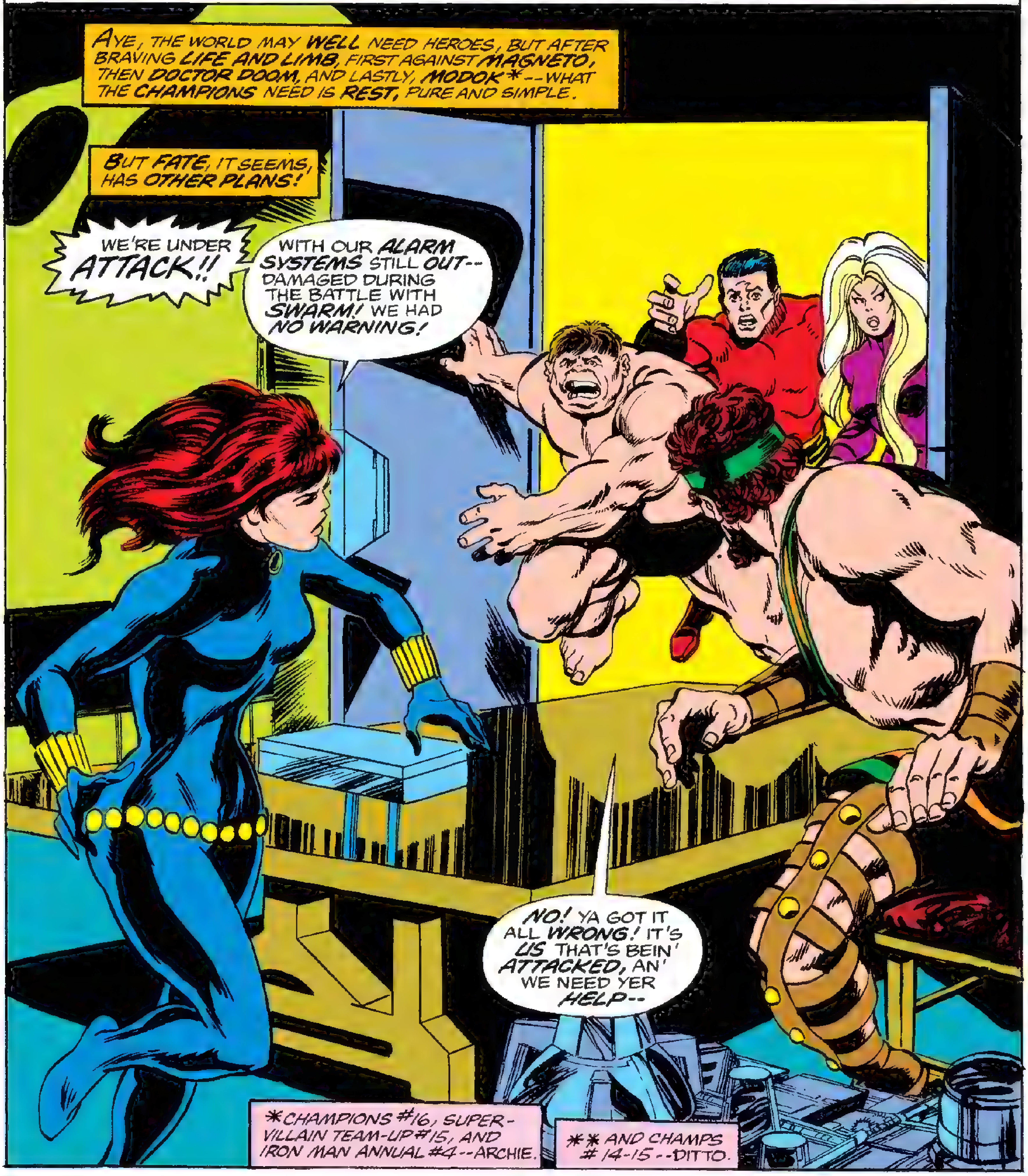
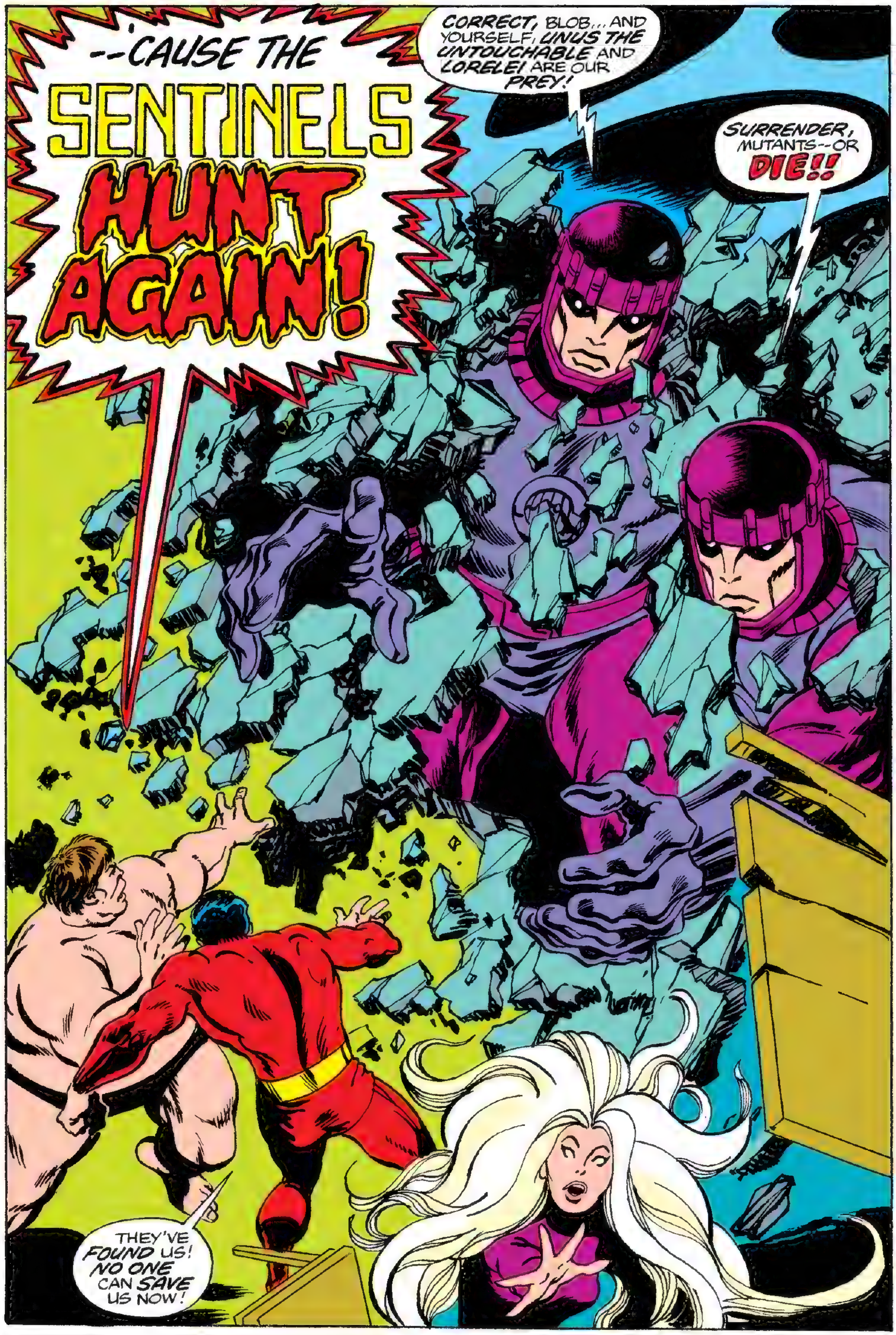
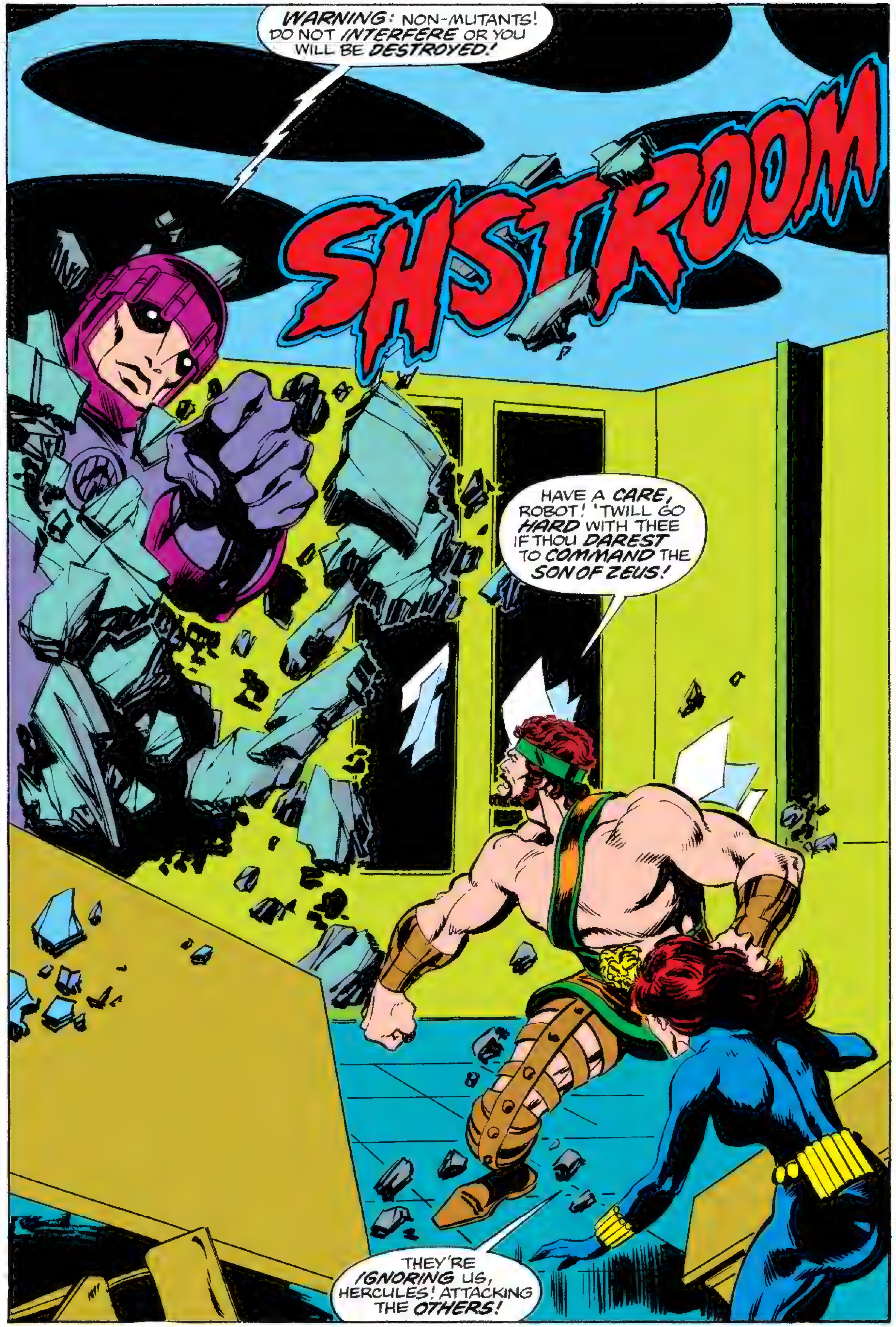
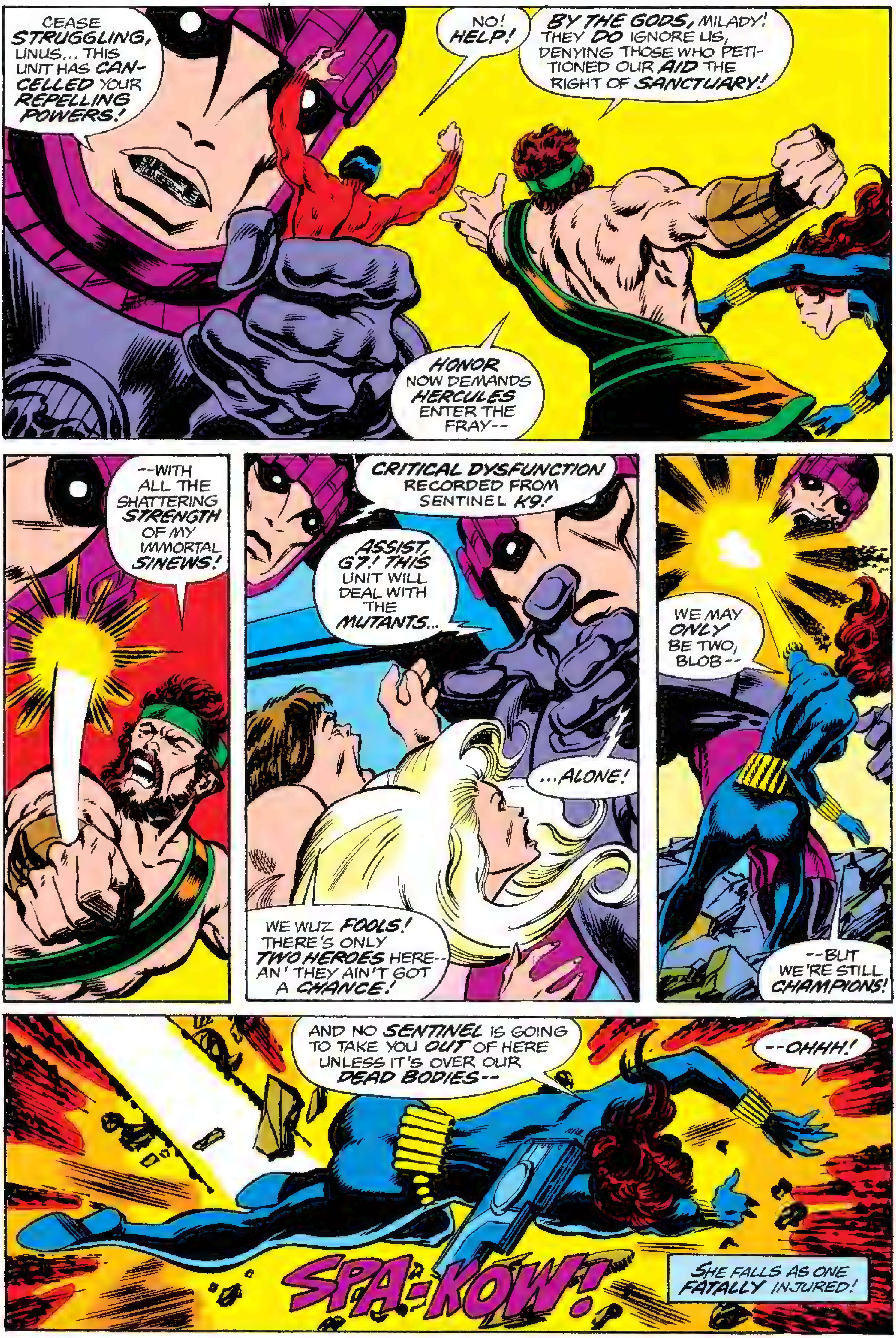
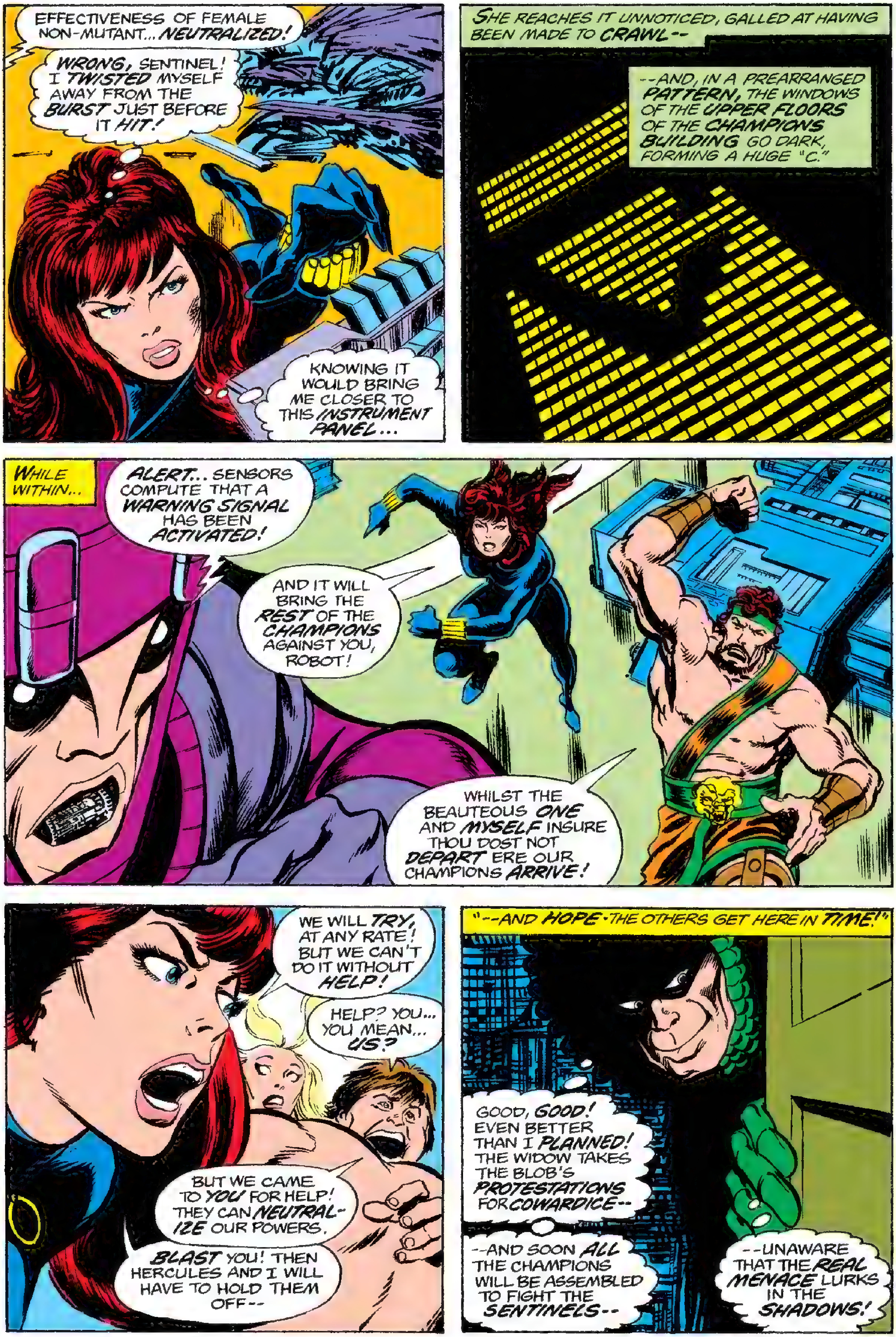
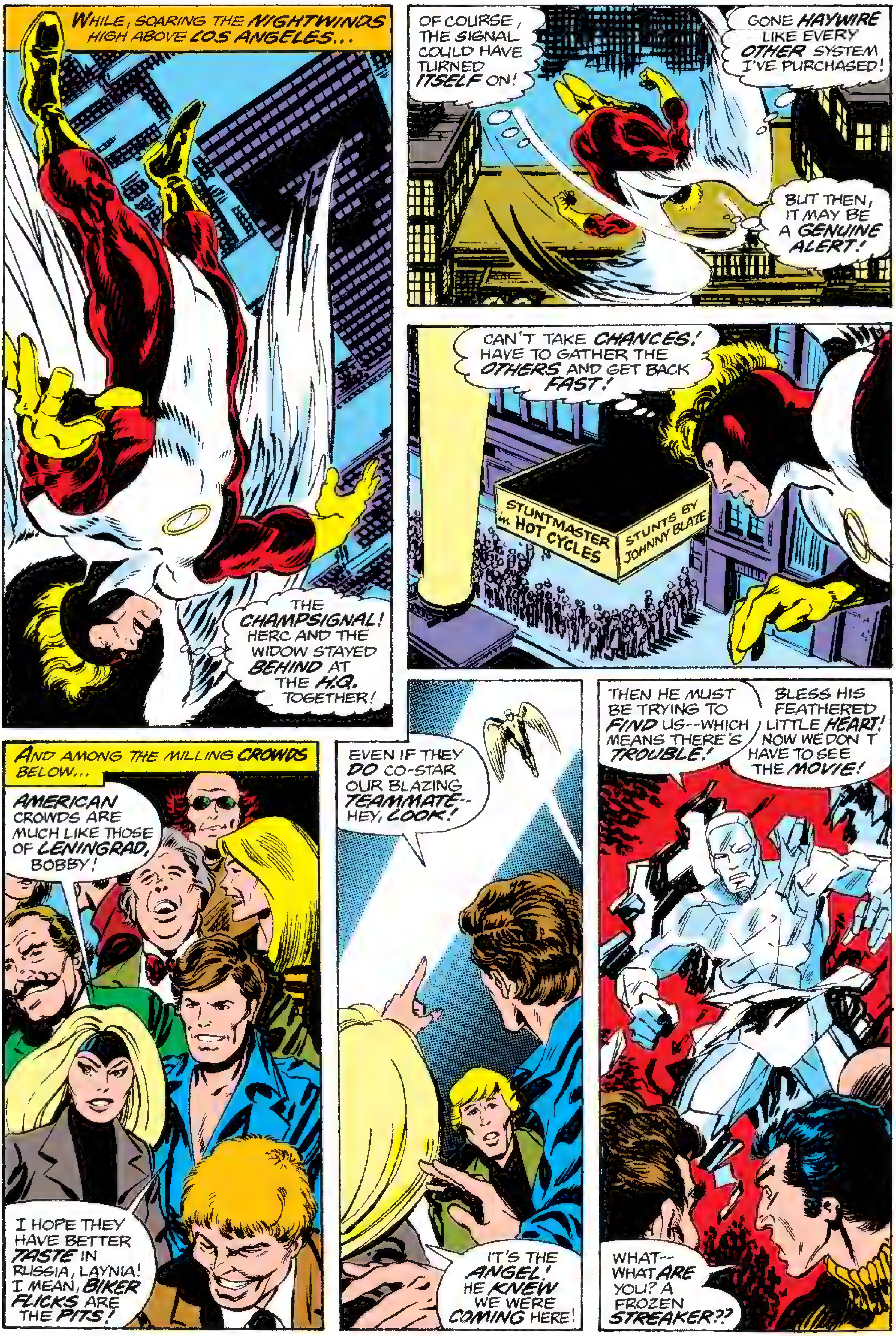

AYE, THE WORLD MAY WELL NEED HEROES, BUT AFTER BRAVING LIFE AND LIMB, FIRST AGAINST MAGNETO, THEN DOCTOR DOOM, AND LASTLY, MODOK* -- WHAT THE CHAMPIONS NEED IS REST, PURE AND SIMPLE.
BUT FATE, IT SEEMS, HAS OTHER PLANS!
WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!!
WITH OUR ALARM SYSTEMS STILL OUT -- DAMAGED DURING THE BATTLE WITH SWARM! WE HAD NO WARNING!
NO! YA GOT IT ALL WRONG! IT'S US THAT'S BEIN' ATTACKED, AN' WE NEED YER HELP --
*CHAMPIONS #16, SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #15, AND IRON MAN ANNUAL #4 -- ARCHIE.
** AND CHAMPS #14-15 -- DITTO.

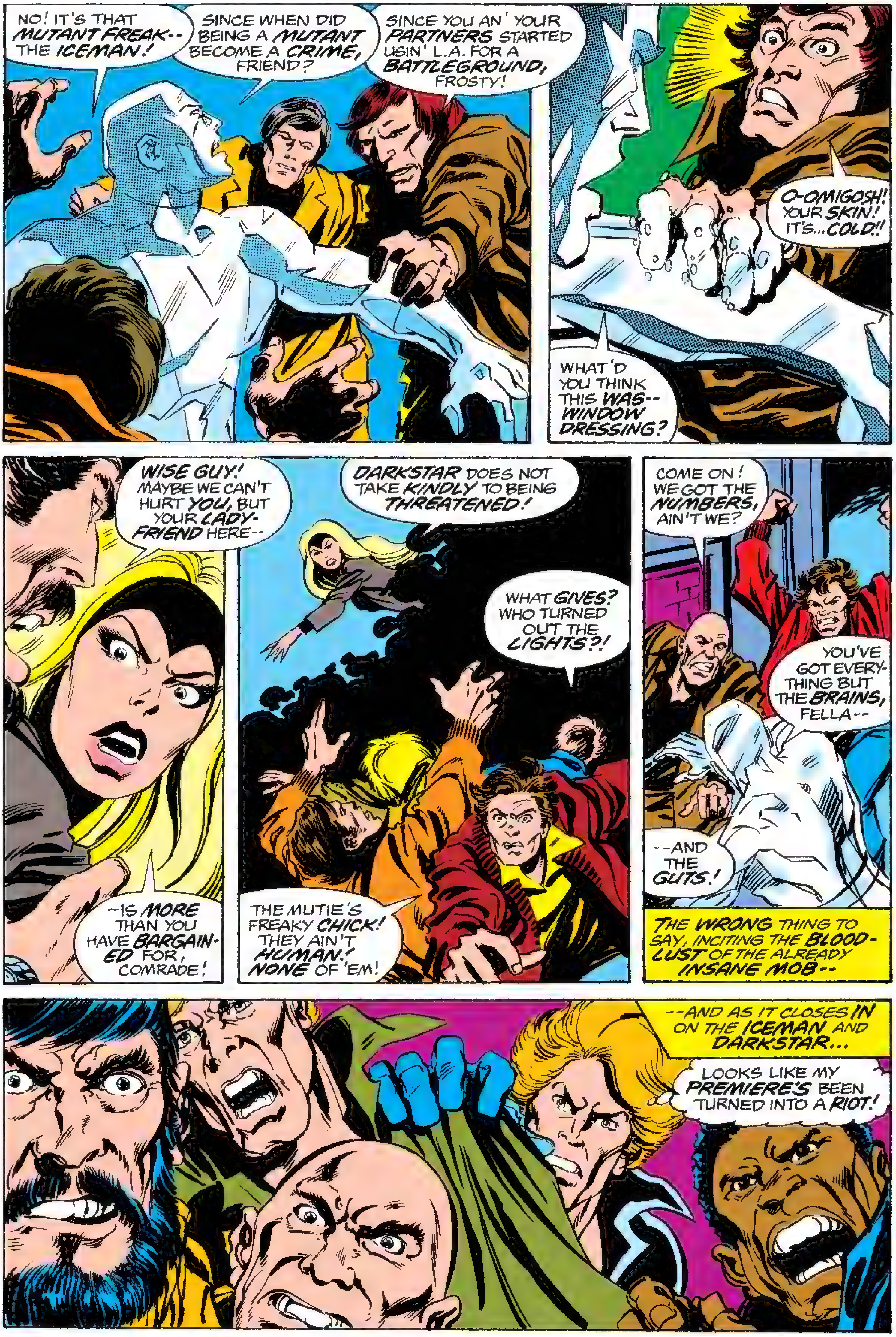

--'CAUSE THE SENTINELS HUNT AGAIN!
CORRECT, BLOB... AND YOURSELF, UNUS THE UNTOUCHABLE AND LORELEI ARE OUR PREY!
SURRENDER, MUTANTS--OR DIE!!
THEY'VE FOUND US! NO ONE CAN SAVE US NOW!

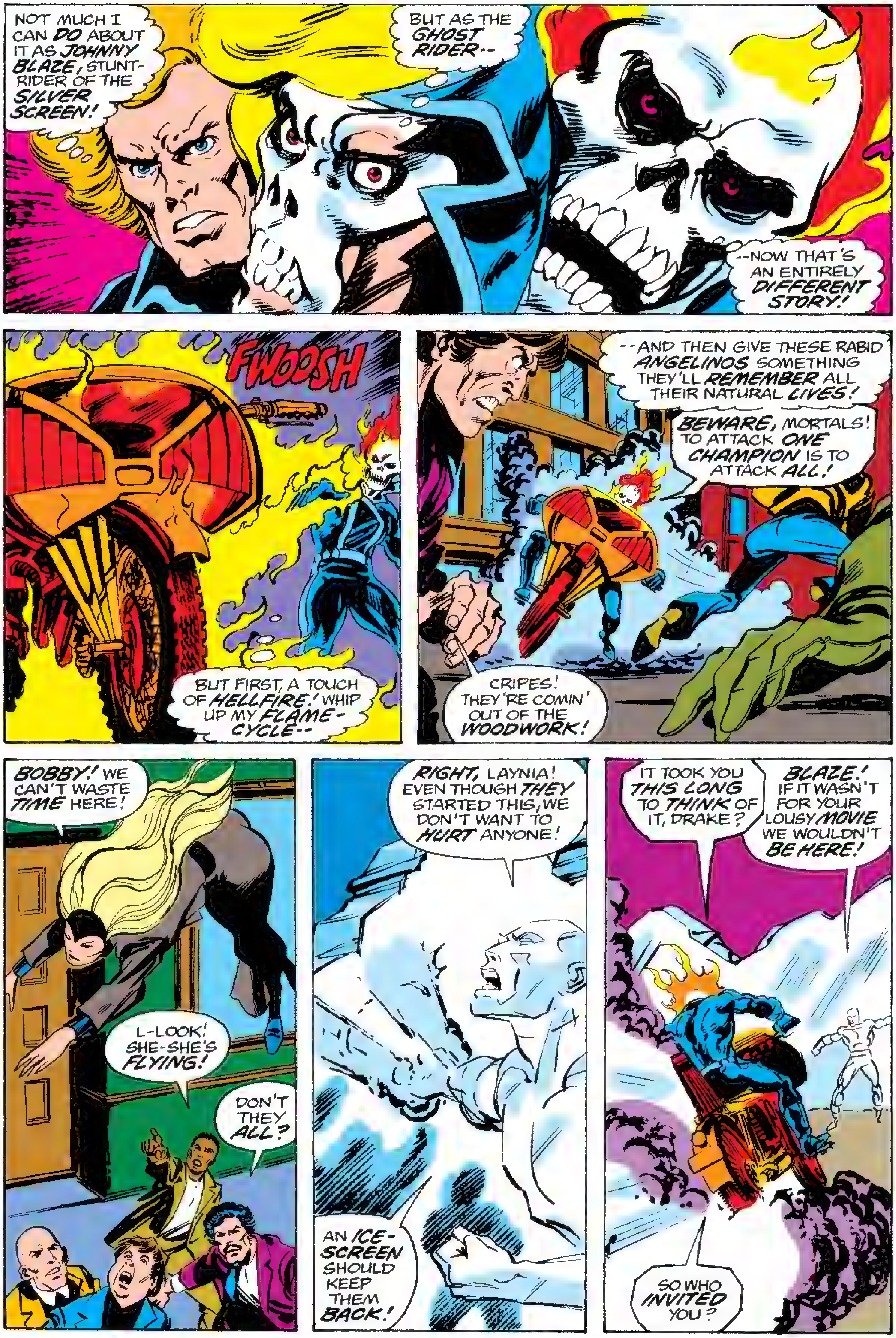

WARNING: NON-MUTANTS! DO NOT INTERFERE OR YOU WILL BE DESTROYED!
SHSTROOM
HAVE A CARE, ROBOT! 'TWILL GO HARD WITH THEE IF THOU DAREST TO COMMAND THE SON OF ZEUS!
THEY'RE IGNORING US, HERCULES! ATTACKING THE OTHERS!

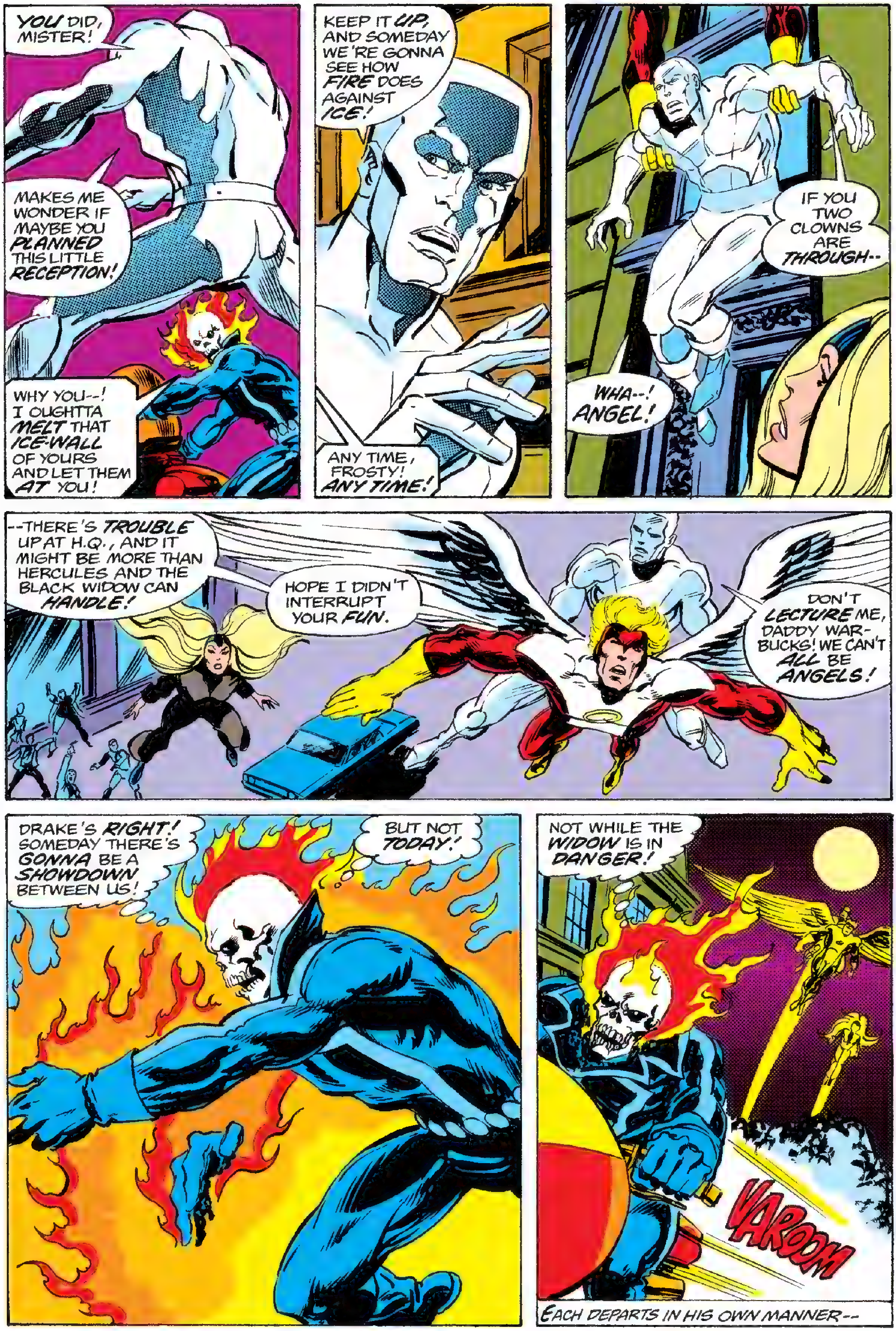

CEASE STRUGGLING, UNUS... THIS UNIT HAS CANCELLED YOUR REPELLING POWERS!
NO! HELP!
BY THE GODS, MILADY! THEY DO IGNORE US, DENYING THOSE WHO PETITIONED OUR AID THE RIGHT OF SANCTUARY!
HONOR NOW DEMANDS HERCULES ENTER THE FRAY--
--WITH ALL THE SHATTERING STRENGTH OF MY IMMORTAL SINEWS!
CRITICAL DYSFUNCTION RECORDED FROM SENTINEL K9!
ASSIST, G7! THIS UNIT WILL DEAL WITH THE MUTANTS...
...ALONE!
WE WUZ FOOLS! THERE'S ONLY TWO HEROES HERE-- AN' THEY AIN'T GOT A CHANCE!
WE MAY ONLY BE TWO, BLOB--
--BUT WE'RE STILL CHAMPIONS!
AND NO SENTINEL IS GOING TO TAKE YOU OUT OF HERE UNLESS IT'S OVER OUR DEAD BODIES--
--OHHH!
SPA-KOW!
SHE FALLS AS ONE FATALLY INJURED!

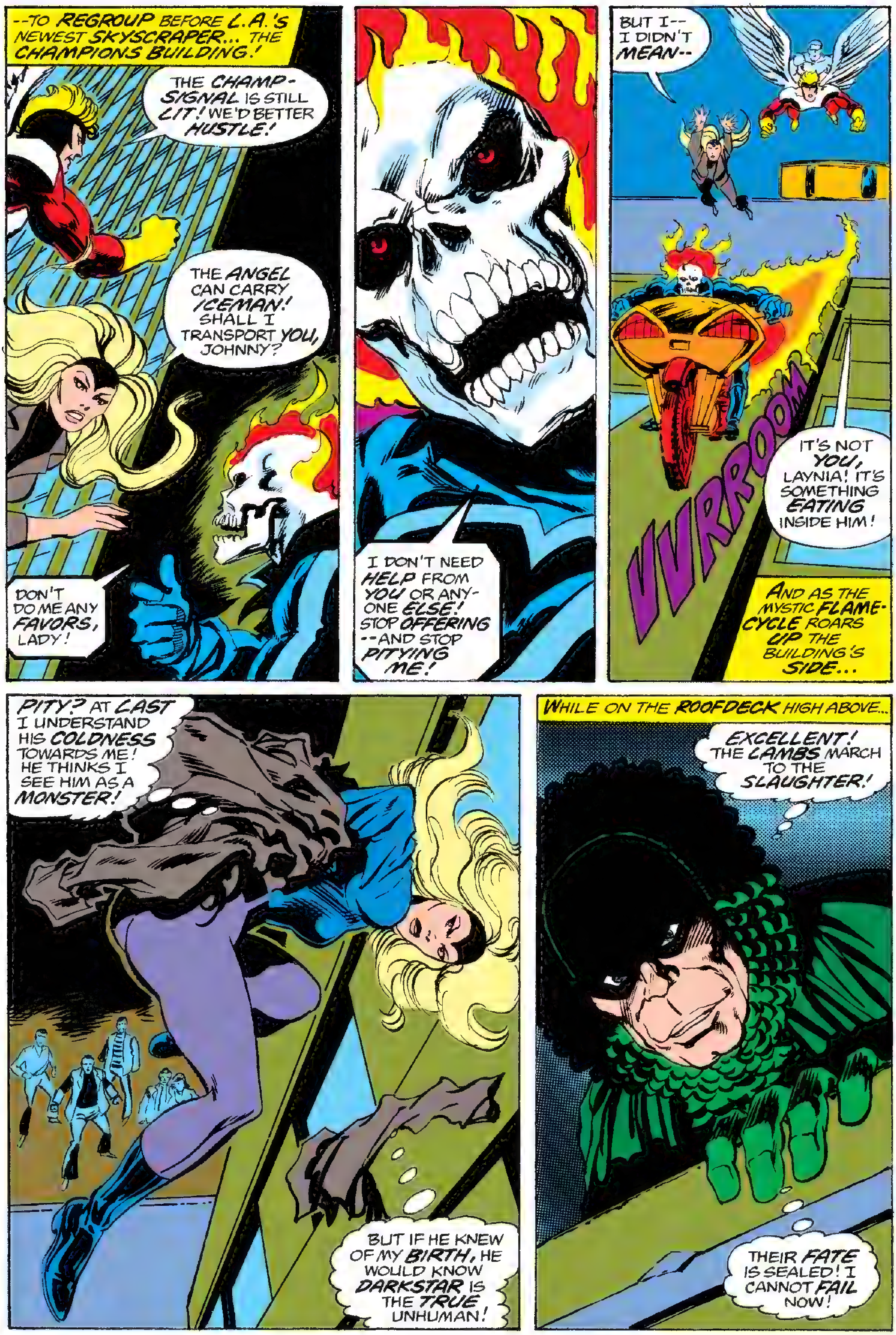

EFFECTIVENESS OF FEMALE NON-MUTANT... NEUTRALIZED!
WRONG, SENTINEL! I TWISTED MYSELF AWAY FROM THE BURST JUST BEFORE IT HIT!
KNOWING IT WOULD BRING ME CLOSER TO THIS INSTRUMENT PANEL...
SHE REACHES IT UNNOTICED, GALLED AT HAVING BEEN MADE TO CRAWL--
--AND, IN A PREARRANGED PATTERN, THE WINDOWS OF THE UPPER FLOORS OF THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING GO DARK, FORMING A HUGE "C."
WHILE WITHIN...
ALERT... SENSORS COMPUTE THAT A WARNING SIGNAL HAS BEEN ACTIVATED!
AND IT WILL BRING THE REST OF THE CHAMPIONS AGAINST YOU, ROBOT!
WHILST THE BEAUTEOUS ONE AND MYSELF INSURE THOU DOST NOT DEPART ERE OUR CHAMPIONS ARRIVE!
WE WILL TRY, AT ANY RATE! BUT WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT HELP!
HELP? YOU... YOU MEAN... US?
BUT WE CAME TO YOU FOR HELP! THEY CAN NEUTRALIZE OUR POWERS.
BLAST YOU! THEN HERCULES AND I WILL HAVE TO HOLD THEM OFF--
"--AND HOPE THE OTHERS GET HERE IN TIME!"
GOOD, GOOD! EVEN BETTER THAN I PLANNED! THE WIDOW TAKES THE BLOB'S PROTESTATIONS FOR COWARDICE--
--AND SOON ALL THE CHAMPIONS WILL BE ASSEMBLED TO FIGHT THE SENTINELS--
--UNAWARE THAT THE REAL MENACE LURKS IN THE SHADOWS!

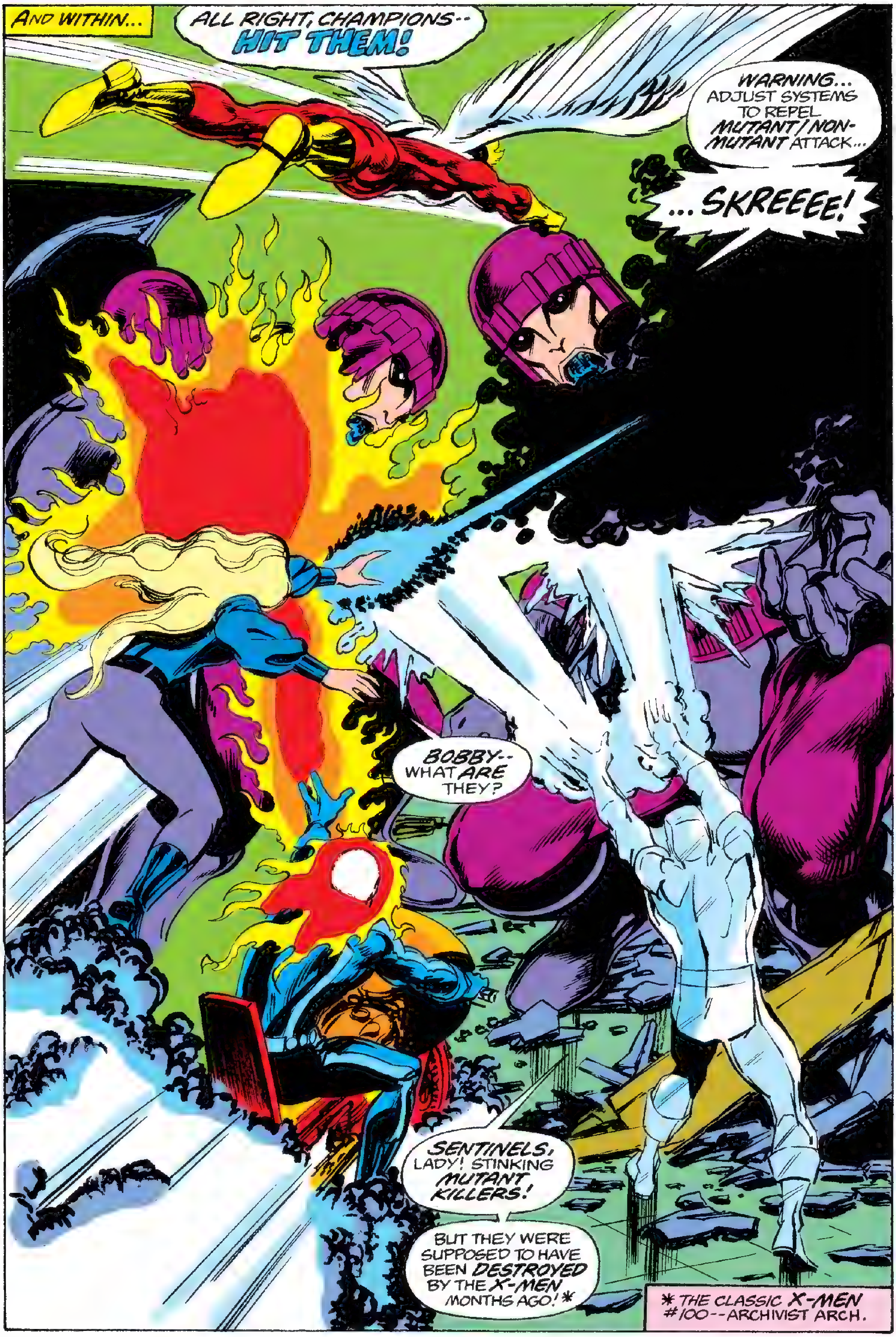

WHILE, SOARING THE NIGHTWINDS HIGH ABOVE LOS ANGELES...
THE CHAMPSIGNAL! HERC AND THE WIDOW STAYED BEHIND AT THE H.Q. TOGETHER!
OF COURSE, THE SIGNAL COULD HAVE TURNED ITSELF ON!
GONE HAYWIRE LIKE EVERY OTHER SYSTEM I'VE PURCHASED!
BUT THEN, IT MAY BE A GENUINE ALERT!
CAN'T TAKE CHANCES! HAVE TO GATHER THE OTHERS AND GET BACK FAST!
STUNTMASTER in HOT CYCLES
STUNTS BY JOHNNY BLAZE
AND AMONG THE MILLING CROWDS BELOW...
AMERICAN CROWDS ARE MUCH LIKE THOSE OF LENINGRAD, BOBBY!
I HOPE THEY HAVE BETTER TASTE IN RUSSIA, LAYNIA! I MEAN, BIKER FLICKS ARE THE PITS!
EVEN IF THEY DO CO-STAR OUR BLAZING TEAMMATE-- HEY, LOOK!
IT'S THE ANGEL! HE KNEW WE WERE COMING HERE!
THEN HE MUST BE TRYING TO FIND US--WHICH MEANS THERE'S TROUBLE!
BLESS HIS FEATHERED LITTLE HEART! NOW WE DON'T HAVE TO SEE THE MOVIE!
WHAT-- WHAT ARE YOU? A FROZEN STREAKER??

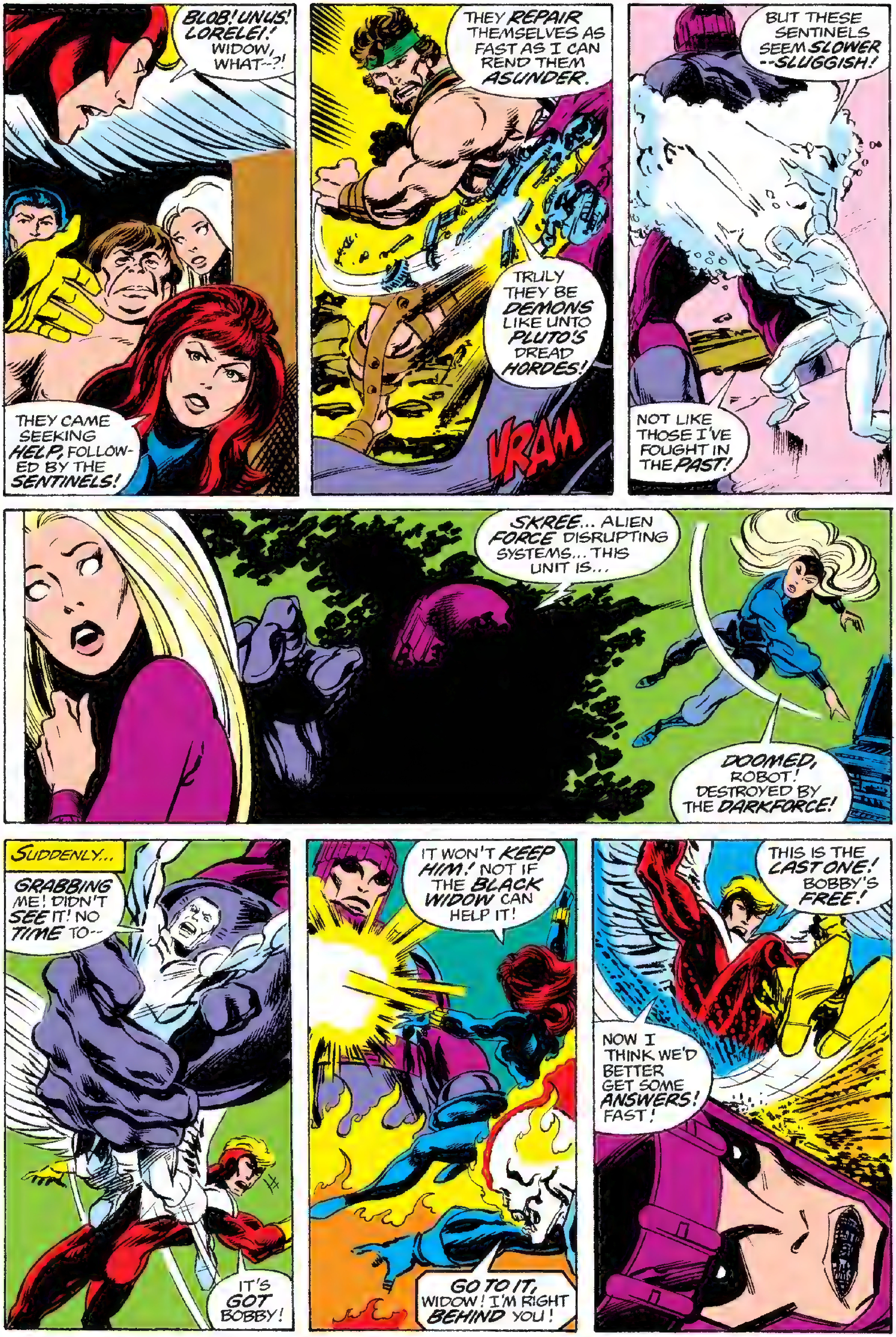

NO! IT'S THAT *MUTANT FREAK*-- THE *ICEMAN!*
SINCE WHEN DID BEING A *MUTANT* BECOME A *CRIME,* FRIEND?
SINCE YOU AN' YOUR *PARTNERS* STARTED USIN' L.A. FOR A *BATTLEGROUND,* FROSTY!
O-OMIGOSH! YOUR *SKIN!* IT'S...*COLD!!*
WHAT'D YOU THINK THIS *WAS*-- *WINDOW DRESSING?*
WISE GUY! MAYBE WE CAN'T HURT *YOU,* BUT YOUR *LADY-FRIEND* HERE--
--IS *MORE* THAN YOU HAVE *BARGAINED* FOR, COMRADE!
DARKSTAR DOES NOT TAKE *KINDLY* TO BEING *THREATENED!*
WHAT *GIVES?* WHO TURNED OUT THE *LIGHTS?!*
THE MUTIE'S FREAKY *CHICK!* THEY AIN'T *HUMAN!* *NONE* OF 'EM!
COME ON! WE GOT THE *NUMBERS,* AIN'T WE?
YOU'VE GOT EVERYTHING BUT THE *BRAINS,* FELLA--
--AND THE *GUTS!*
THE WRONG THING TO SAY, INCITING THE BLOOD-LUST OF THE ALREADY INSANE MOB--
--AND AS IT CLOSES IN ON THE ICEMAN AND DARKSTAR...
LOOKS LIKE MY *PREMIERE'S* BEEN TURNED INTO A *RIOT!*

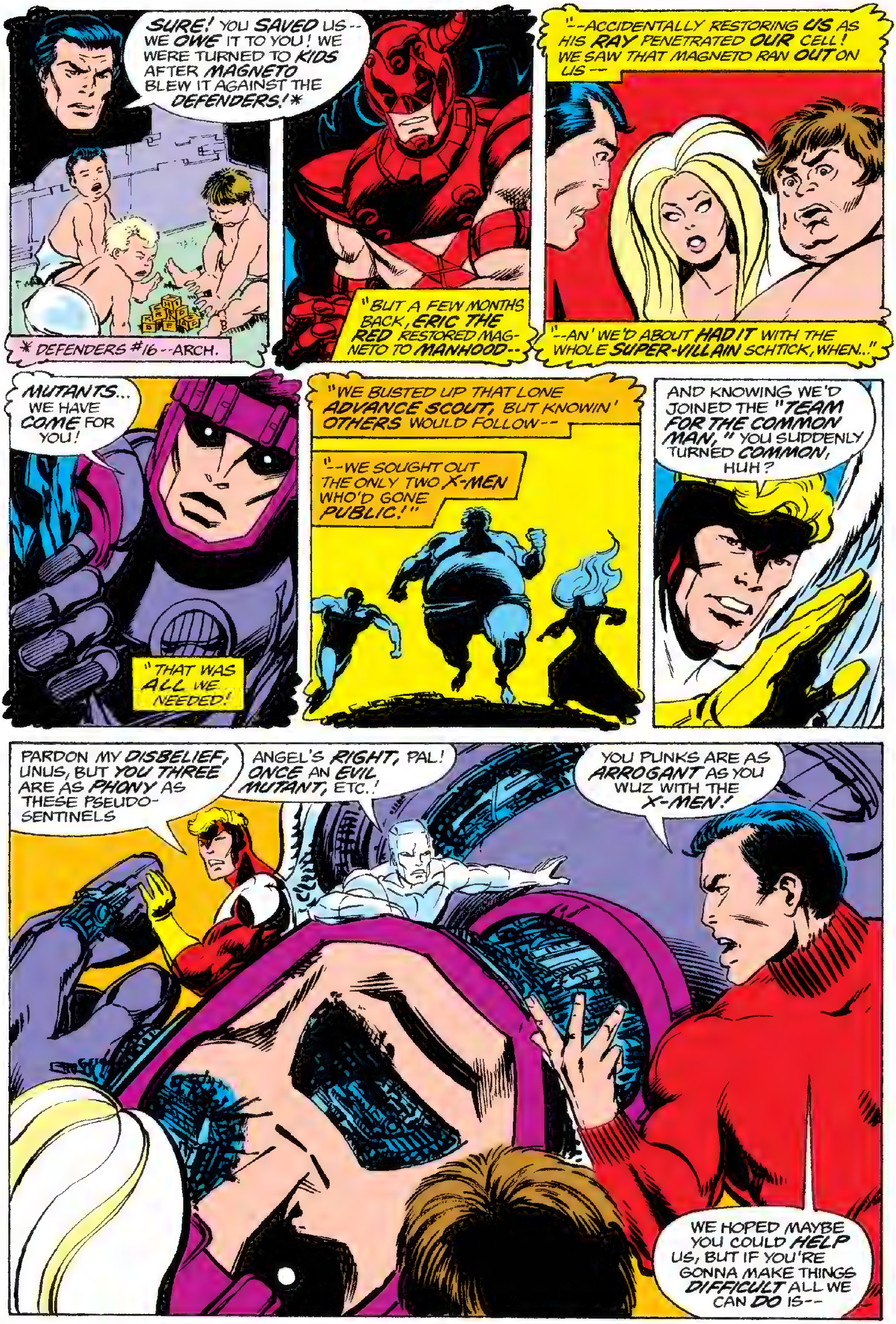

NOT MUCH I CAN *DO* ABOUT IT AS *JOHNNY BLAZE*, STUNT-RIDER OF THE *SILVER SCREEN!*
BUT AS THE *GHOST RIDER*--
--NOW THAT'S AN ENTIRELY *DIFFERENT STORY!*
FWOOSH
BUT FIRST, A TOUCH OF *HELLFIRE!* WHIP UP MY *FLAME-CYCLE*--
--AND THEN GIVE THESE RABID *ANGELINOS* SOMETHING THEY'LL *REMEMBER* ALL THEIR NATURAL *LIVES!*
BEWARE, MORTALS! TO ATTACK *ONE CHAMPION* IS TO ATTACK *ALL!*
CRIPES! THEY'RE COMIN' OUT OF THE *WOODWORK!*
BOBBY! WE CAN'T WASTE *TIME* HERE!
L-LOOK! SHE-SHE'S *FLYING!*
DON'T THEY *ALL?*
RIGHT, LAYNIA! EVEN THOUGH *THEY* STARTED THIS, WE DON'T WANT TO *HURT* ANYONE!
AN *ICE-SCREEN* SHOULD KEEP THEM *BACK!*
IT TOOK YOU *THIS LONG* TO *THINK* OF IT, DRAKE?
BLAZE! IF IT WASN'T FOR YOUR LOUSY *MOVIE* WE WOULDN'T *BE HERE!*
SO WHO *INVITED* YOU?

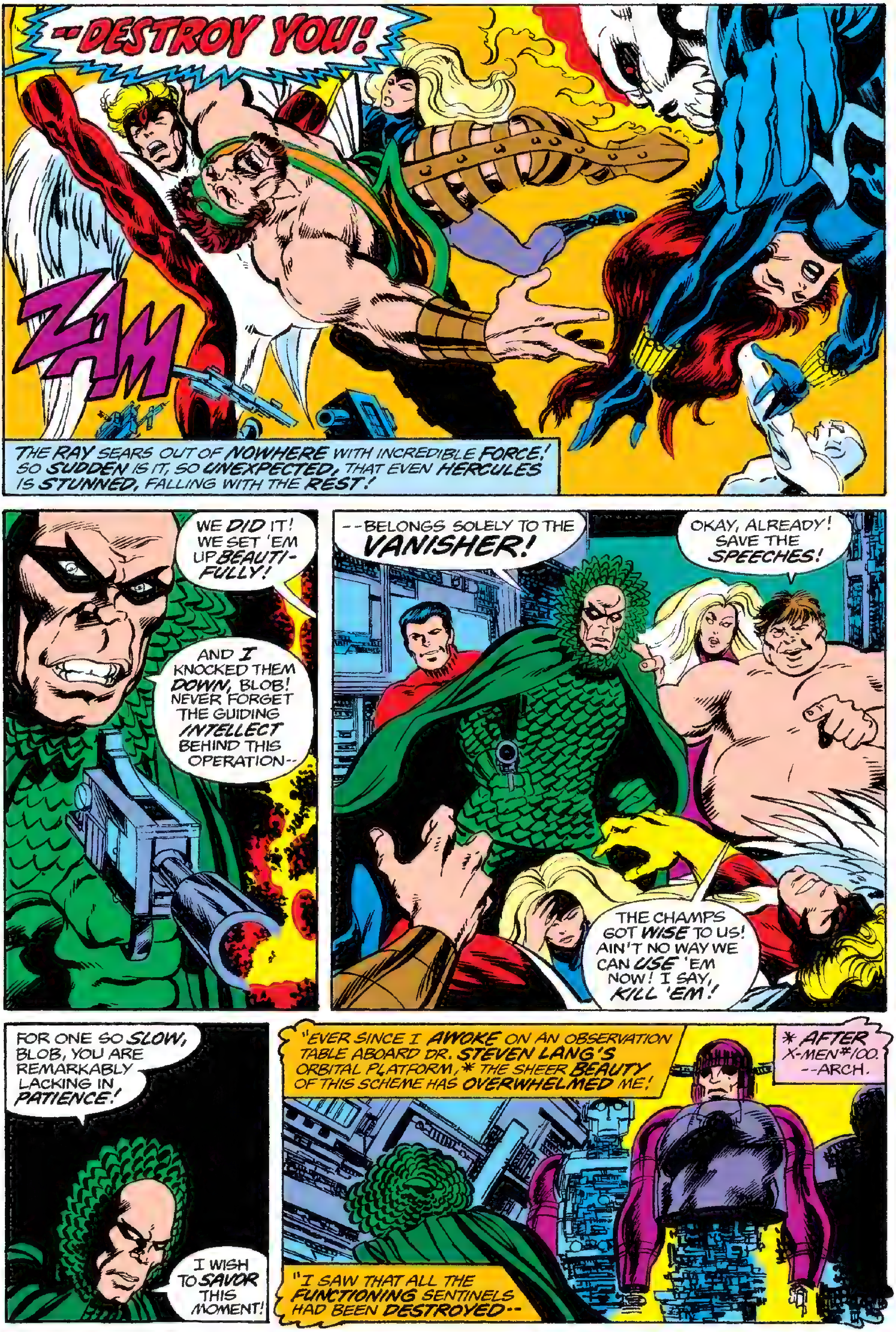

YOU DID, MISTER!
MAKES ME WONDER IF MAYBE YOU PLANNED THIS LITTLE RECEPTION!
WHY YOU--! I OUGHTTA MELT THAT ICE-WALL OF YOURS AND LET THEM AT YOU!
KEEP IT UP, AND SOMEDAY WE'RE GONNA SEE HOW FIRE DOES AGAINST ICE!
ANY TIME, FROSTY! ANY TIME!
IF YOU TWO CLOWNS ARE THROUGH--
WHA--! ANGEL!
--THERE'S TROUBLE UP AT H.Q., AND IT MIGHT BE MORE THAN HERCULES AND THE BLACK WIDOW CAN HANDLE!
HOPE I DIDN'T INTERRUPT YOUR FUN.
DON'T LECTURE ME, DADDY WAR-BUCKS! WE CAN'T ALL BE ANGELS!
DRAKE'S RIGHT! SOMEDAY THERE'S GONNA BE A SHOWDOWN BETWEEN US!
BUT NOT TODAY!
NOT WHILE THE WIDOW IS IN DANGER!
VAROOM
EACH DEPARTS IN HIS OWN MANNER--

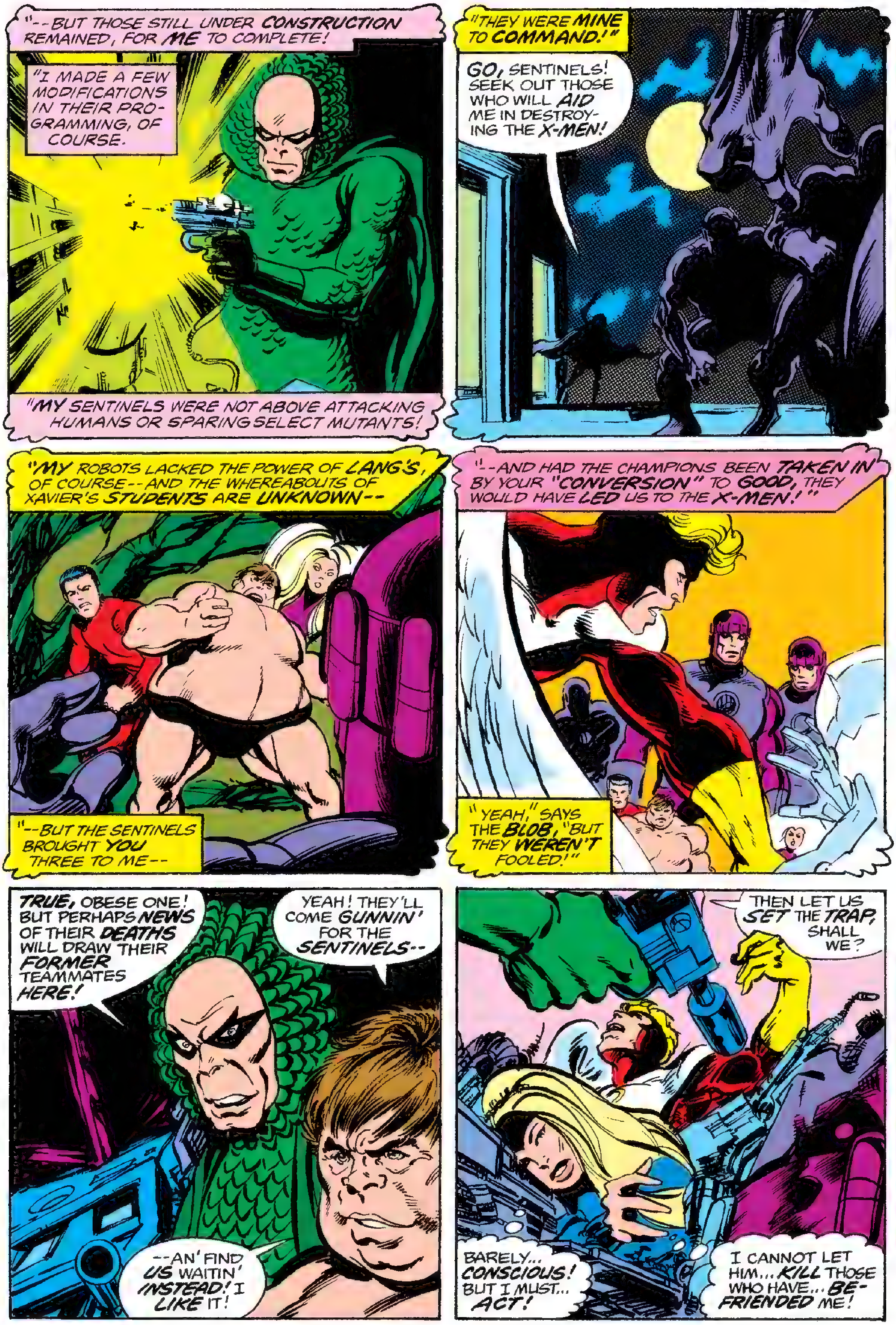

--TO REGROUP BEFORE L.A.'S NEWEST SKYSCRAPER... THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING!
THE CHAMP-SIGNAL IS STILL LIT! WE'D BETTER HUSTLE!
THE ANGEL CAN CARRY ICEMAN! SHALL I TRANSPORT YOU, JOHNNY?
DON'T DO ME ANY FAVORS, LADY!
I DON'T NEED HELP FROM YOU OR ANY-ONE ELSE! STOP OFFERING --AND STOP PITYING ME!
BUT I-- I DIDN'T MEAN--
VVRROOM
IT'S NOT YOU, LAYNIA! IT'S SOMETHING EATING INSIDE HIM!
AND AS THE MYSTIC FLAME-CYCLE ROARS UP THE BUILDING'S SIDE...
PITY? AT LAST I UNDERSTAND HIS COLDNESS TOWARDS ME! HE THINKS I SEE HIM AS A MONSTER!
BUT IF HE KNEW OF MY BIRTH, HE WOULD KNOW DARKSTAR IS THE TRUE UNHUMAN!
WHILE ON THE ROOFDECK HIGH ABOVE...
EXCELLENT! THE LAMBS MARCH TO THE SLAUGHTER!
THEIR FATE IS SEALED! I CANNOT FAIL NOW!

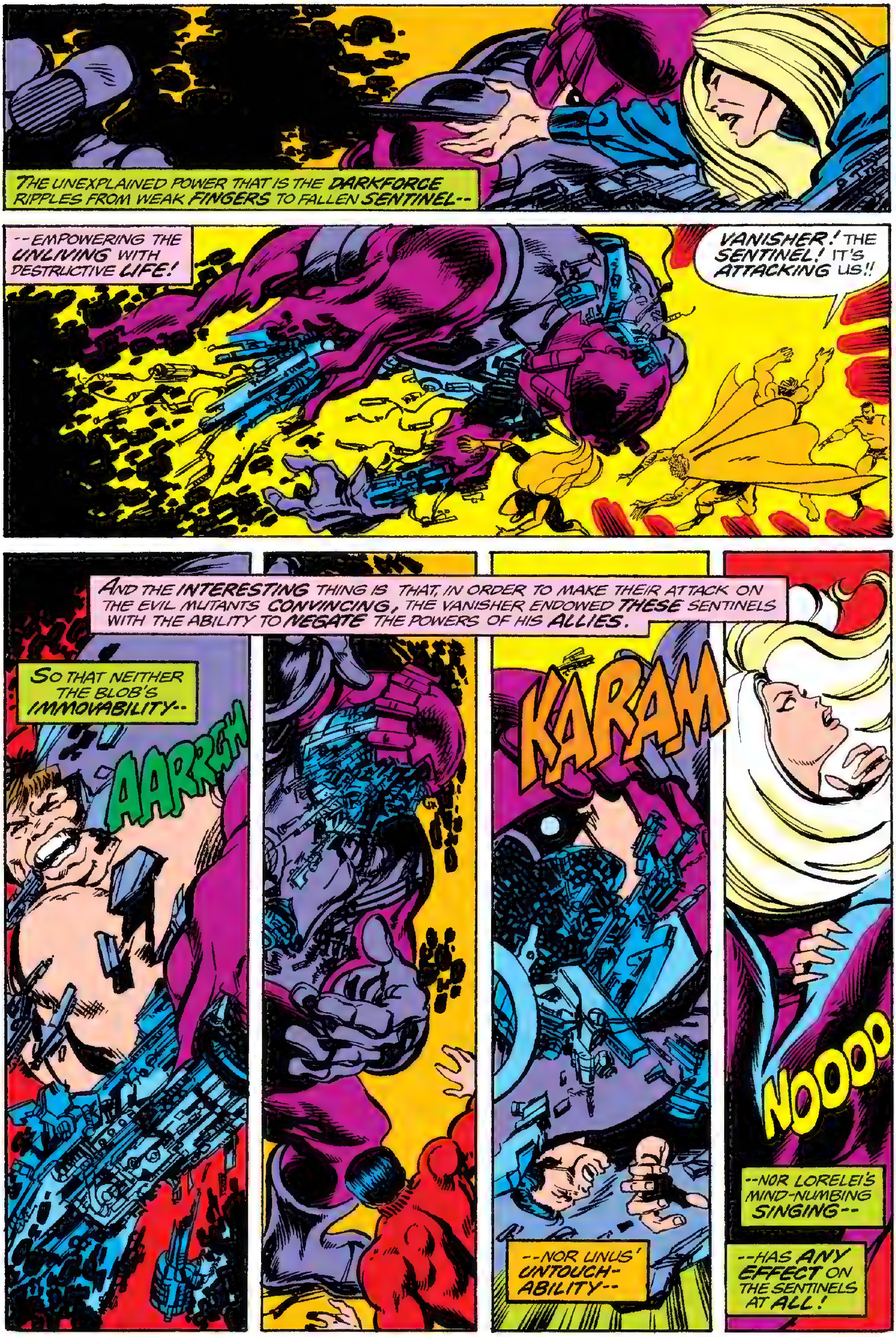

AND WITHIN...
ALL RIGHT, CHAMPIONS-- HIT THEM!
WARNING... ADJUST SYSTEMS TO REPEL MUTANT/NON-MUTANT ATTACK...
...SKREEEEE!
BOBBY-- WHAT ARE THEY?
SENTINELS, LADY! STINKING MUTANT KILLERS!
BUT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED BY THE X-MEN MONTHS AGO! *
* THE CLASSIC X-MEN #100--ARCHIVIST ARCH.

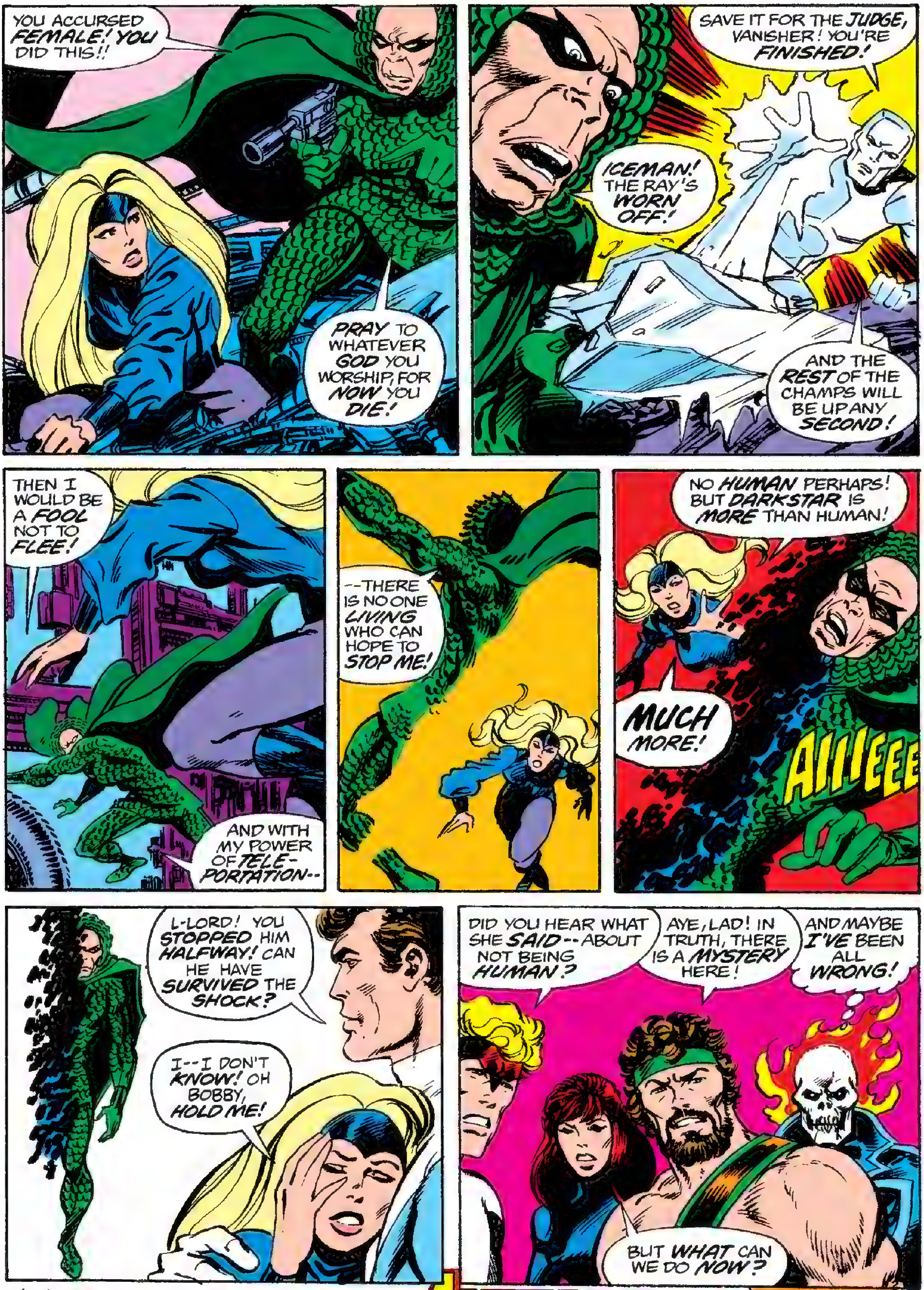

BLOB! UNUS! LORELEI! WIDOW, WHAT--?!
THEY CAME SEEKING HELP, FOLLOWED BY THE SENTINELS!
THEY REPAIR THEMSELVES AS FAST AS I CAN REND THEM ASUNDER.
TRULY THEY BE DEMONS LIKE UNTO PLUTO'S DREAD HORDES!
VRAM
BUT THESE SENTINELS SEEM SLOWER --SLUGGISH!
NOT LIKE THOSE I'VE FOUGHT IN THE PAST!
SKREE... ALIEN FORCE DISRUPTING SYSTEMS... THIS UNIT IS...
DOOMED, ROBOT! DESTROYED BY THE DARKFORCE!
SUDDENLY...
GRABBING ME! DIDN'T SEE IT! NO TIME TO--
IT'S GOT BOBBY!
IT WON'T KEEP HIM! NOT IF THE BLACK WIDOW CAN HELP IT!
GO TO IT, WIDOW! I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
THIS IS THE LAST ONE! BOBBY'S FREE!
NOW I THINK WE'D BETTER GET SOME ANSWERS! FAST!


SURE! YOU SAVED US-- WE OWE IT TO YOU! WE WERE TURNED TO KIDS AFTER MAGNETO BLEW IT AGAINST THE DEFENDERS!*
* DEFENDERS #16 --ARCH.
"BUT A FEW MONTHS BACK, ERIC THE RED RESTORED MAGNETO TO MANHOOD--
"--ACCIDENTALLY RESTORING US AS HIS RAY PENETRATED OUR CELL! WE SAW THAT MAGNETO RAN OUT ON US--
"--AN' WE'D ABOUT HAD IT WITH THE WHOLE SUPER-VILLAIN SCHTICK, WHEN..."
MUTANTS... WE HAVE COME FOR YOU!
"THAT WAS ALL WE NEEDED!
"WE BUSTED UP THAT LONE ADVANCE SCOUT, BUT KNOWIN' OTHERS WOULD FOLLOW--
"--WE SOUGHT OUT THE ONLY TWO X-MEN WHO'D GONE PUBLIC!"
AND KNOWING WE'D JOINED THE "TEAM FOR THE COMMON MAN," YOU SUDDENLY TURNED COMMON, HUH?
PARDON MY DISBELIEF, UNUS, BUT YOU THREE ARE AS PHONY AS THESE PSEUDO-SENTINELS
ANGEL'S RIGHT, PAL! ONCE AN EVIL MUTANT, ETC.!
YOU PUNKS ARE AS ARROGANT AS YOU WUZ WITH THE X-MEN!
WE HOPED MAYBE YOU COULD HELP US, BUT IF YOU'RE GONNA MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT ALL WE CAN DO IS--


--DESTROY YOU!
ZAM
THE RAY SEARS OUT OF NOWHERE WITH INCREDIBLE FORCE! SO SUDDEN IS IT, SO UNEXPECTED, THAT EVEN HERCULES IS STUNNED, FALLING WITH THE REST!
WE DID IT! WE SET 'EM UP BEAUTIFULLY!
AND I KNOCKED THEM DOWN, BLOB! NEVER FORGET THE GUIDING INTELLECT BEHIND THIS OPERATION--
--BELONGS SOLELY TO THE VANISHER!
OKAY, ALREADY! SAVE THE SPEECHES!
THE CHAMPS GOT WISE TO US! AIN'T NO WAY WE CAN USE 'EM NOW! I SAY, KILL 'EM!
FOR ONE SO SLOW, BLOB, YOU ARE REMARKABLY LACKING IN PATIENCE!
I WISH TO SAVOR THIS MOMENT!
"EVER SINCE I AWOKE ON AN OBSERVATION TABLE ABOARD DR. STEVEN LANG'S ORBITAL PLATFORM,* THE SHEER BEAUTY OF THIS SCHEME HAS OVERWHELMED ME!
* AFTER X-MEN #100. --ARCH.
"I SAW THAT ALL THE FUNCTIONING SENTINELS HAD BEEN DESTROYED--


"--BUT THOSE STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION REMAINED, FOR ME TO COMPLETE!
"I MADE A FEW MODIFICATIONS IN THEIR PROGRAMMING, OF COURSE.
"MY SENTINELS WERE NOT ABOVE ATTACKING HUMANS OR SPARING SELECT MUTANTS!
"THEY WERE MINE TO COMMAND!"
GO, SENTINELS! SEEK OUT THOSE WHO WILL AID ME IN DESTROYING THE X-MEN!
"MY ROBOTS LACKED THE POWER OF LANG'S, OF COURSE--AND THE WHEREABOUTS OF XAVIER'S STUDENTS ARE UNKNOWN--
"--BUT THE SENTINELS BROUGHT YOU THREE TO ME--
"--AND HAD THE CHAMPIONS BEEN TAKEN IN BY YOUR "CONVERSION" TO GOOD, THEY WOULD HAVE LED US TO THE X-MEN!"
"YEAH," SAYS THE BLOB, "BUT THEY WEREN'T FOOLED!"
TRUE, OBESE ONE! BUT PERHAPS NEWS OF THEIR DEATHS WILL DRAW THEIR FORMER TEAMMATES HERE!
YEAH! THEY'LL COME GUNNIN' FOR THE SENTINELS--
--AN' FIND US WAITIN' INSTEAD! I LIKE IT!
THEN LET US SET THE TRAP, SHALL WE?
BARELY... CONSCIOUS! BUT I MUST... ACT!
I CANNOT LET HIM... KILL THOSE WHO HAVE... BEFRIENDED ME!


THE UNEXPLAINED POWER THAT IS THE DARKFORCE RIPPLES FROM WEAK FINGERS TO FALLEN SENTINEL--
--EMPOWERING THE UNLIVING WITH DESTRUCTIVE LIFE!
VANISHER! THE SENTINEL! IT'S ATTACKING US!!
AND THE INTERESTING THING IS THAT, IN ORDER TO MAKE THEIR ATTACK ON THE EVIL MUTANTS CONVINCING, THE VANISHER ENDOWED THESE SENTINELS WITH THE ABILITY TO NEGATE THE POWERS OF HIS ALLIES.
SO THAT NEITHER THE BLOB'S IMMOVABILITY--
AARRGH
KARAM
--NOR UNUS' UNTOUCH-ABILITY--
NOOOO
--NOR LORELEI'S MIND-NUMBING SINGING--
--HAS ANY EFFECT ON THE SENTINELS AT ALL!


YOU ACCURSED FEMALE! YOU DID THIS!!
PRAY TO WHATEVER GOD YOU WORSHIP, FOR NOW YOU DIE!
SAVE IT FOR THE JUDGE, VANISHER! YOU'RE FINISHED!
ICEMAN! THE RAY'S WORN OFF!
AND THE REST OF THE CHAMPS WILL BE UP ANY SECOND!
THEN I WOULD BE A FOOL NOT TO FLEE!
AND WITH MY POWER OF TELE-PORTATION--
--THERE IS NO ONE LIVING WHO CAN HOPE TO STOP ME!
NO HUMAN PERHAPS! BUT DARKSTAR IS MORE THAN HUMAN!
MUCH MORE!
AIIIEEE
L-LORD! YOU STOPPED HIM HALFWAY! CAN HE HAVE SURVIVED THE SHOCK?
I--I DON'T KNOW! OH BOBBY, HOLD ME!
DID YOU HEAR WHAT SHE SAID--ABOUT NOT BEING HUMAN?
AYE, LAD! IN TRUTH, THERE IS A MYSTERY HERE!
AND MAYBE I'VE BEEN ALL WRONG!
BUT WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

A VERY GOOD QUESTION, WIDOW! BUT IT'S ONE WHICH WILL BE ANSWERED IN A FUTURE ISSUE OF THE... AVENGERS

SEE OUR LETTERS PAGE FOR FURTHER DETAILS!

THE SPECTACULAR SPIDERMAN ®
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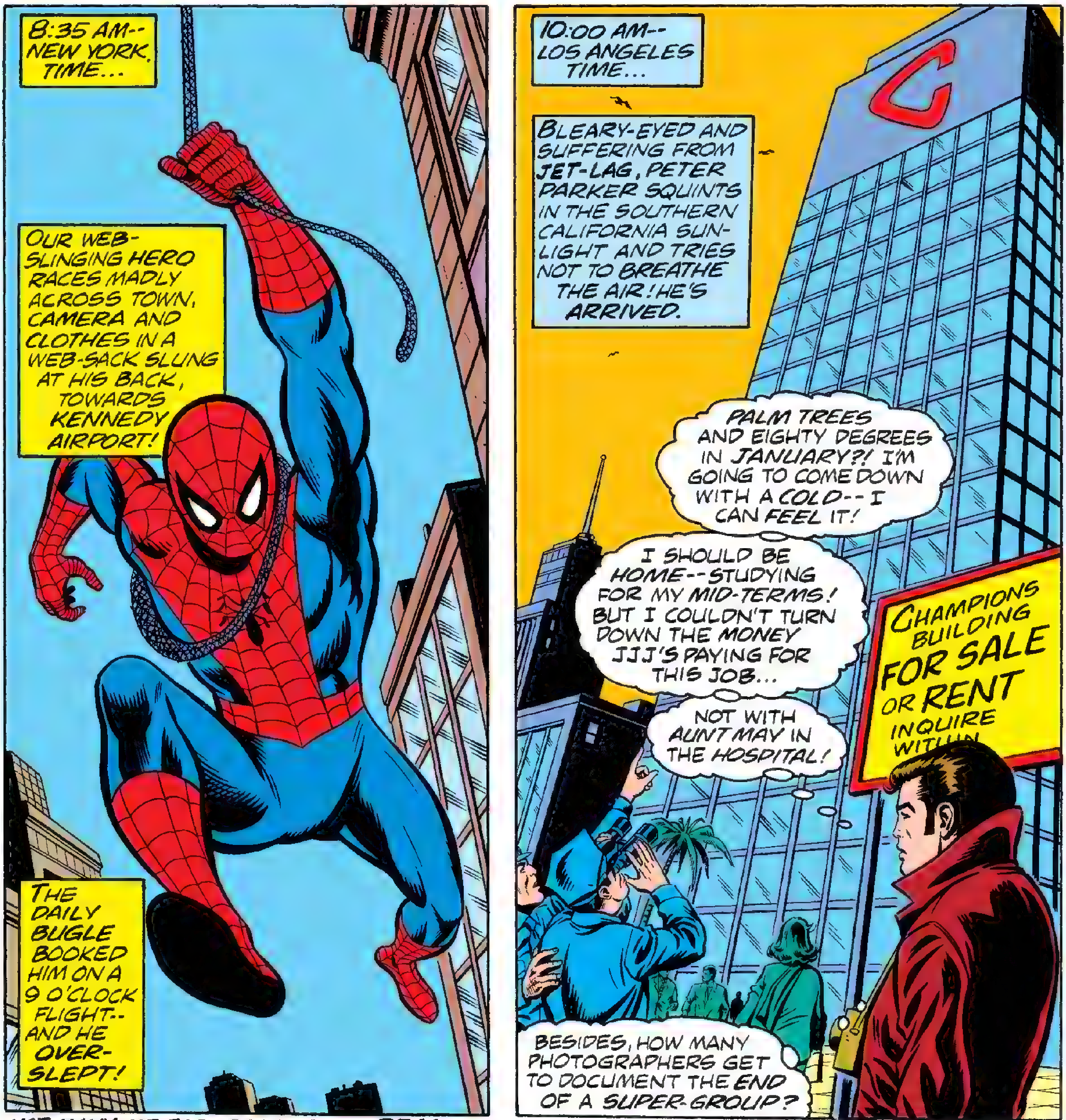
PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN®
NO, WALL-CRAWLER! I CAN'T LET YOU FIGHT HIM--NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS!
YOU'RE NUTS, ANGEL! HE MEANS TO WASTE US BOTH--
--AND HE'S GOT THE POWER TO DO IT!
TO THE LAST CHAMPION!

While attending a demonstration in radiology, student PETER PARKER was bitten by a spider which had accidentally been exposed to RADIOACTIVE RAYS. Through a miracle of science, Peter soon found that he had GAINED the arachnid's powers...and had, in effect, become a human spider...

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN!

BILL MANTLO WRITER * SAL BUSCEMA & DAVID HUNT ARTISTS * BRUCE-LETTERER * JANICE-COLORIST * ARCHIE GOODWIN EDITOR

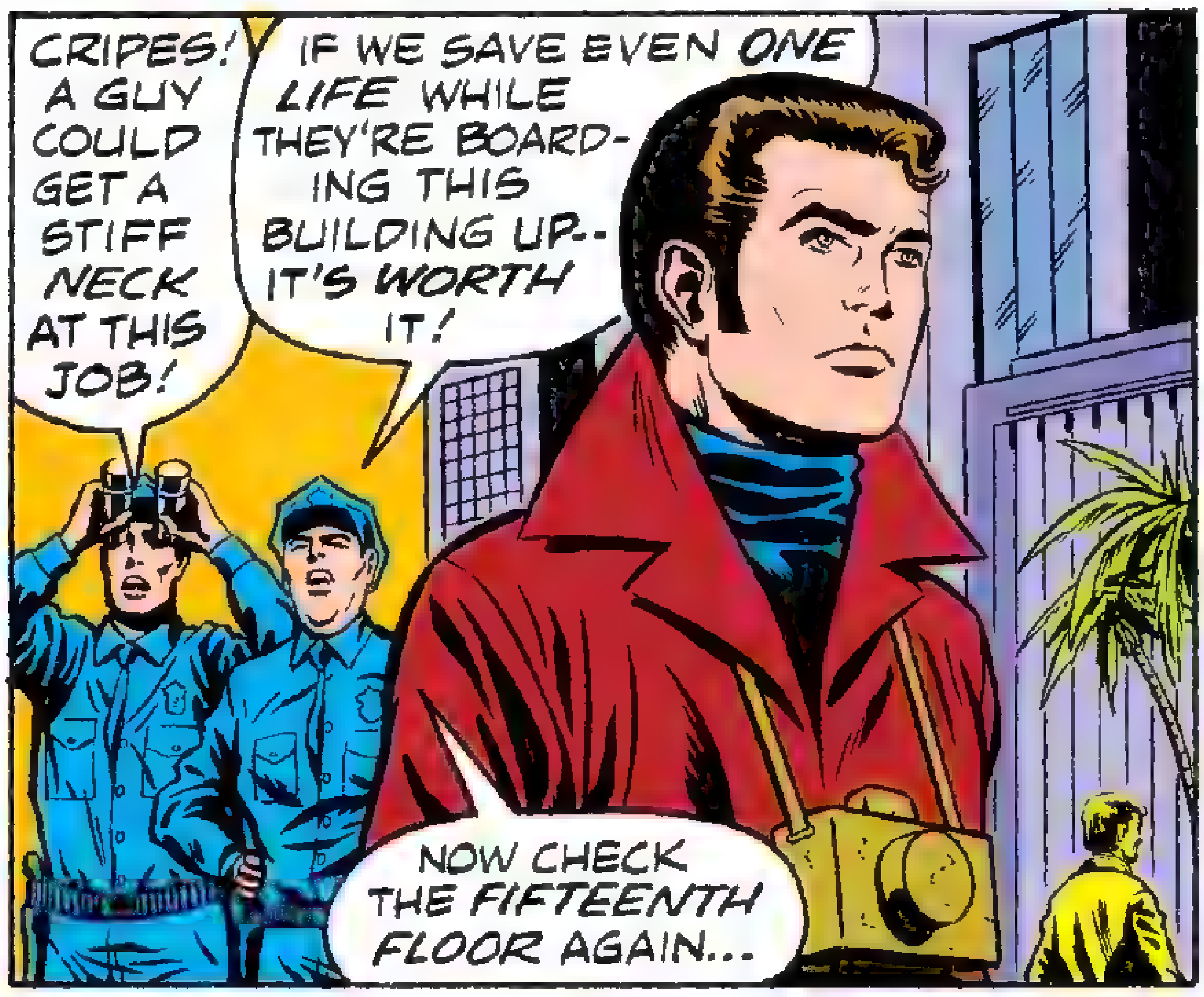

8:35 AM-- NEW YORK TIME...
OUR WEB-SLINGING HERO RACES MADLY ACROSS TOWN, CAMERA AND CLOTHES IN A WEB-SACK SLUNG AT HIS BACK, TOWARDS KENNEDY AIRPORT!
THE DAILY BUGLE BOOKED HIM ON A 9 O'CLOCK FLIGHT-- AND HE OVER-SLEPT!
10:00 AM-- LOS ANGELES TIME...
BLEARY-EYED AND SUFFERING FROM JET-LAG, PETER PARKER SQUINTS IN THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SUN-LIGHT AND TRIES NOT TO BREATHE THE AIR! HE'S ARRIVED.
PALM TREES AND EIGHTY DEGREES IN JANUARY?! I'M GOING TO COME DOWN WITH A COLD-- I CAN FEEL IT!
I SHOULD BE HOME--STUDYING FOR MY MID-TERMS! BUT I COULDN'T TURN DOWN THE MONEY JJJ'S PAYING FOR THIS JOB...
NOT WITH AUNT MAY IN THE HOSPITAL!
CHAMPIONS BUILDING FOR SALE OR RENT INQUIRE WITHIN
BESIDES, HOW MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS GET TO DOCUMENT THE END OF A SUPER-GROUP?

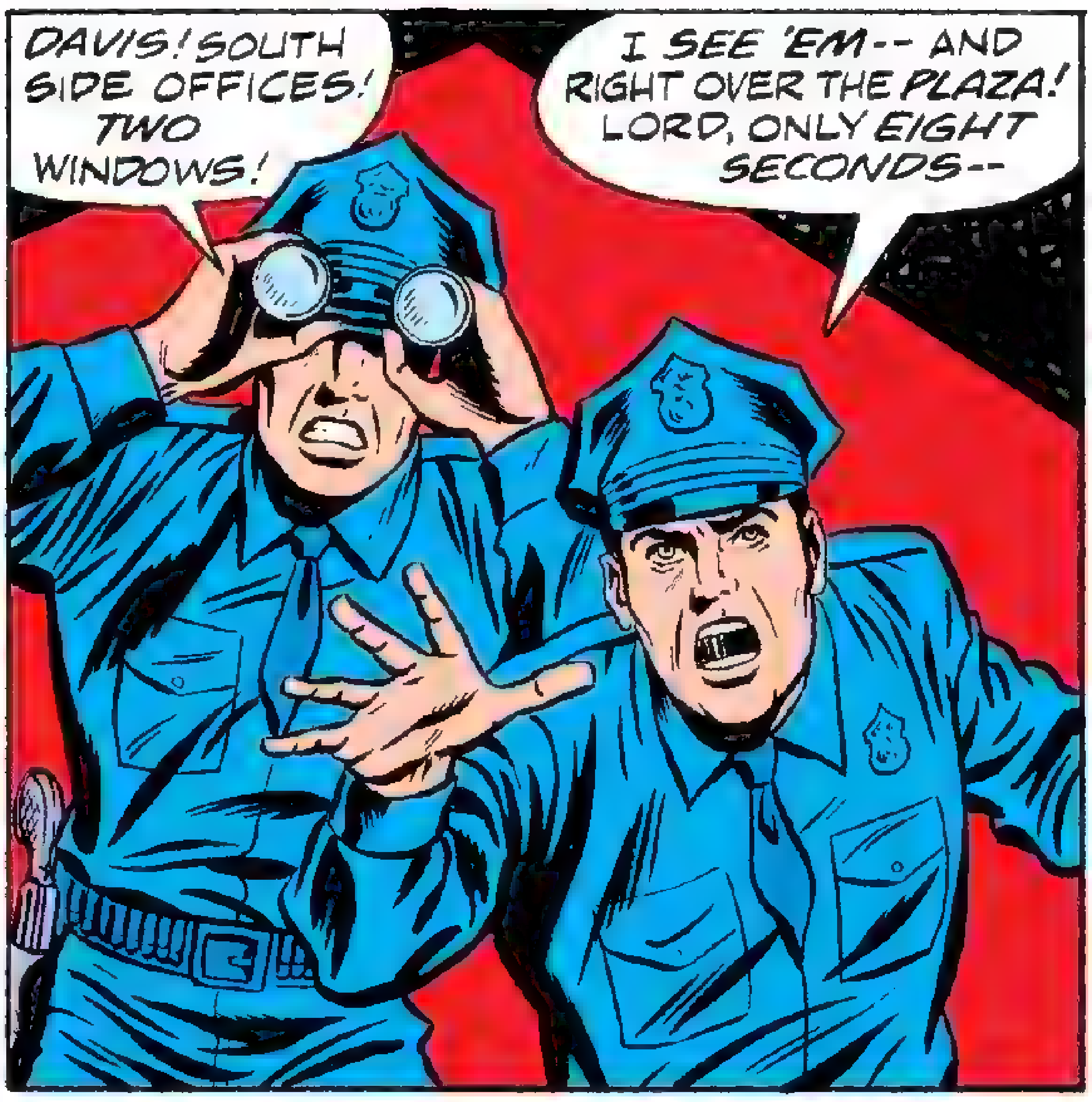
NOT MANY, MR. PARKER! BUT THE REAL STORY BEFORE THIS DAY IS OUT WILL BE...

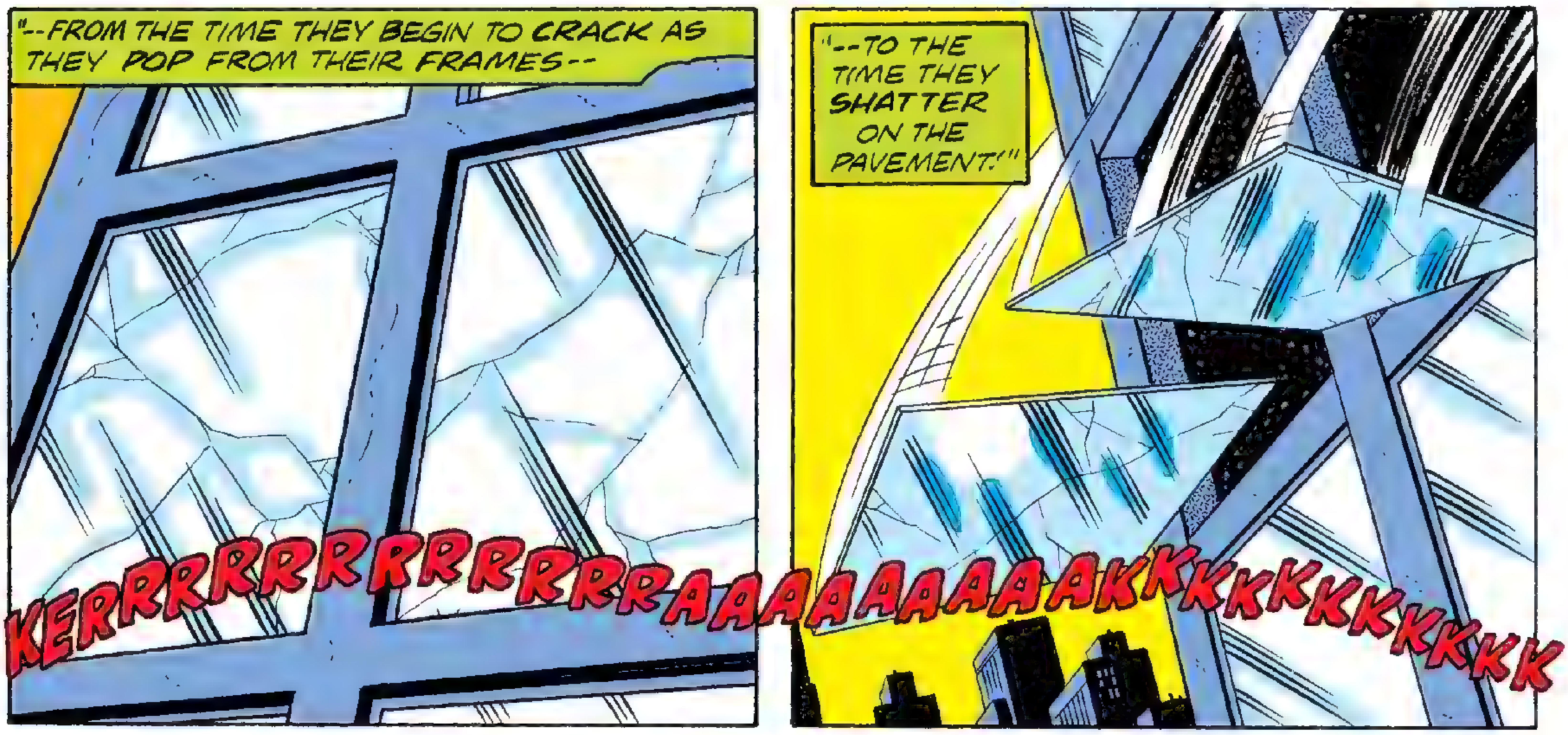
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE ICEMAN?

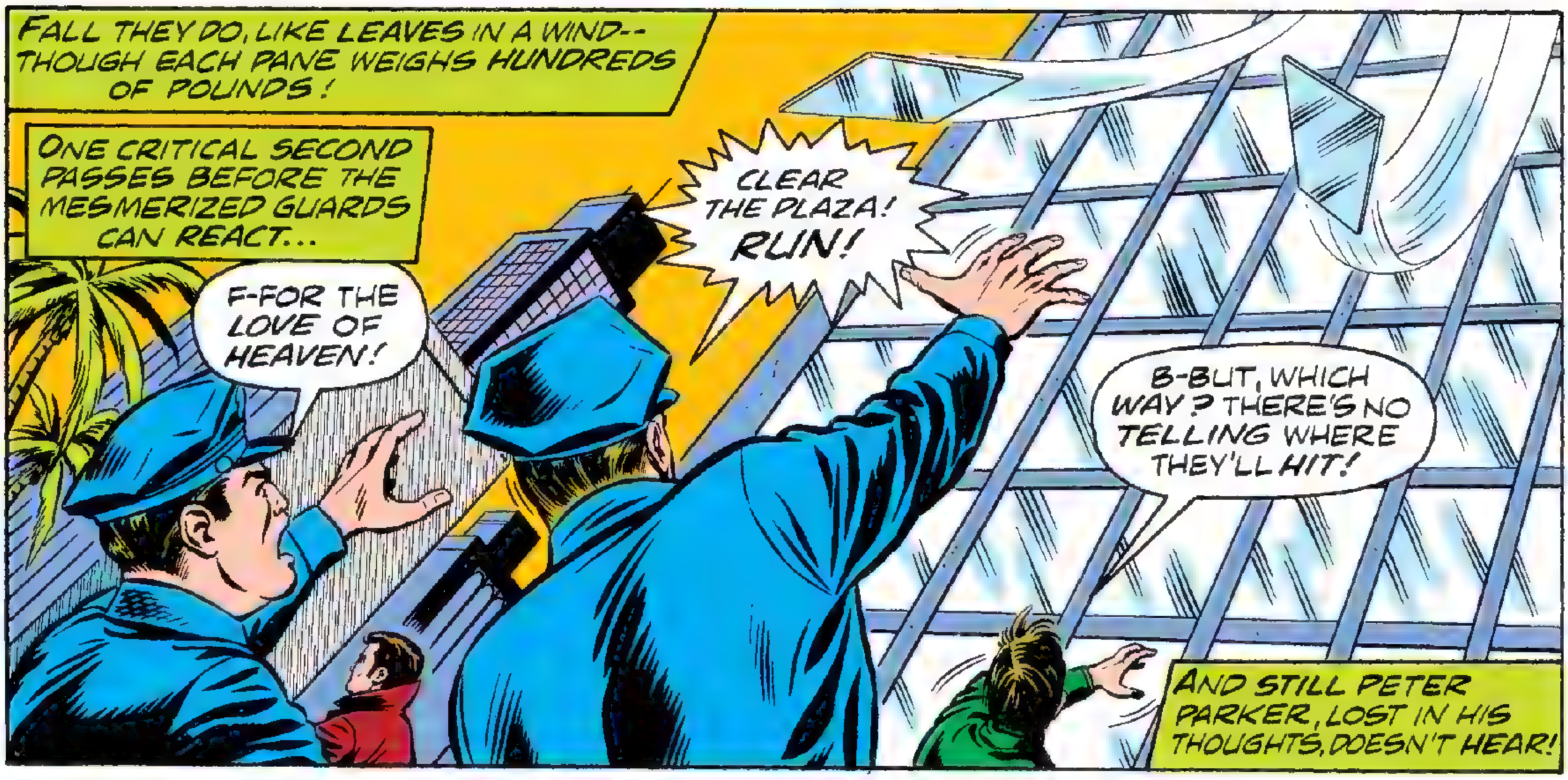
C-646

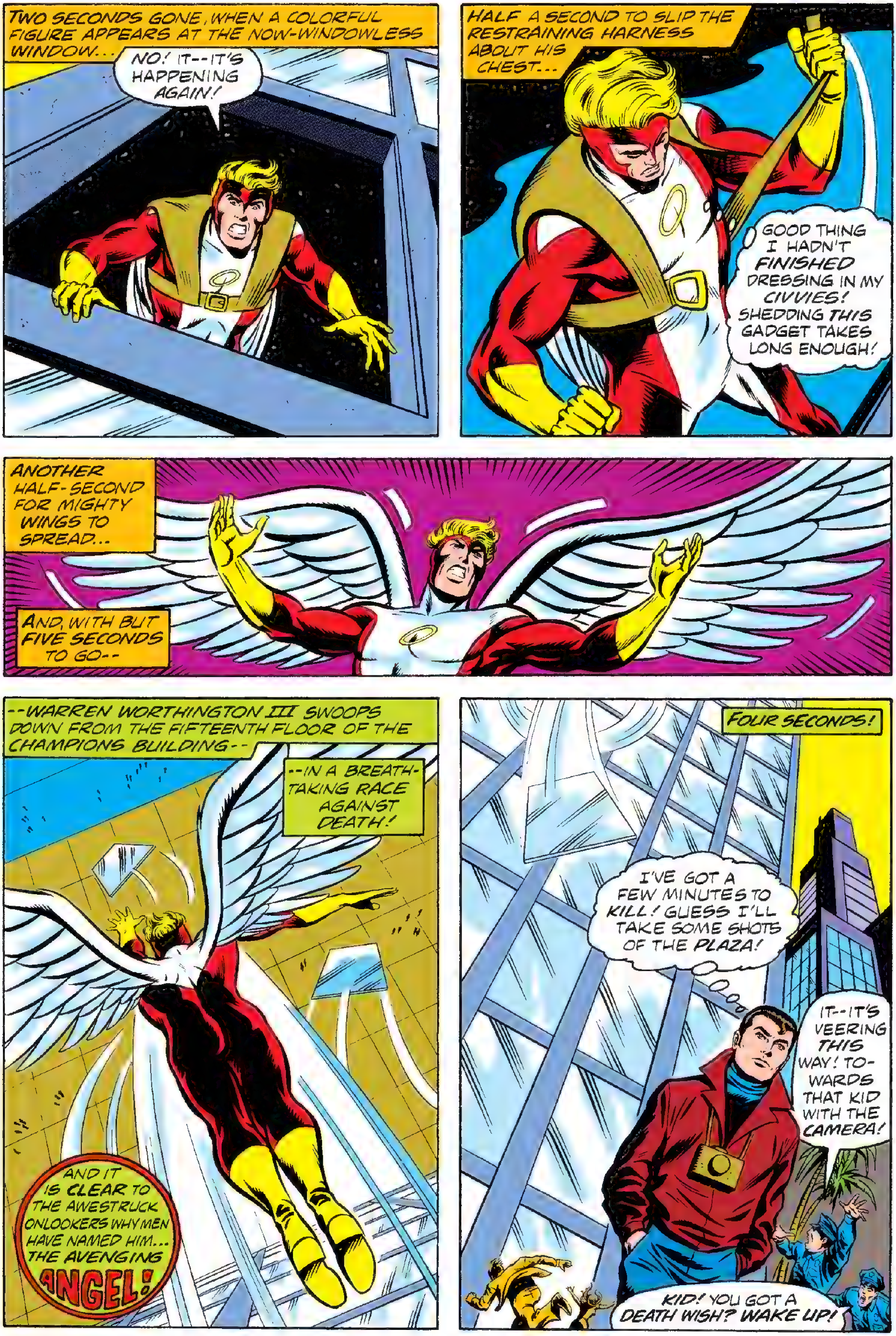
STILL NOT QUITE AWAKE, PETER FAILS TO OVERHEAR THE CONVERSATION OF TWO SECURITY GUARDS ON THE PLAZA BEHIND HIM...

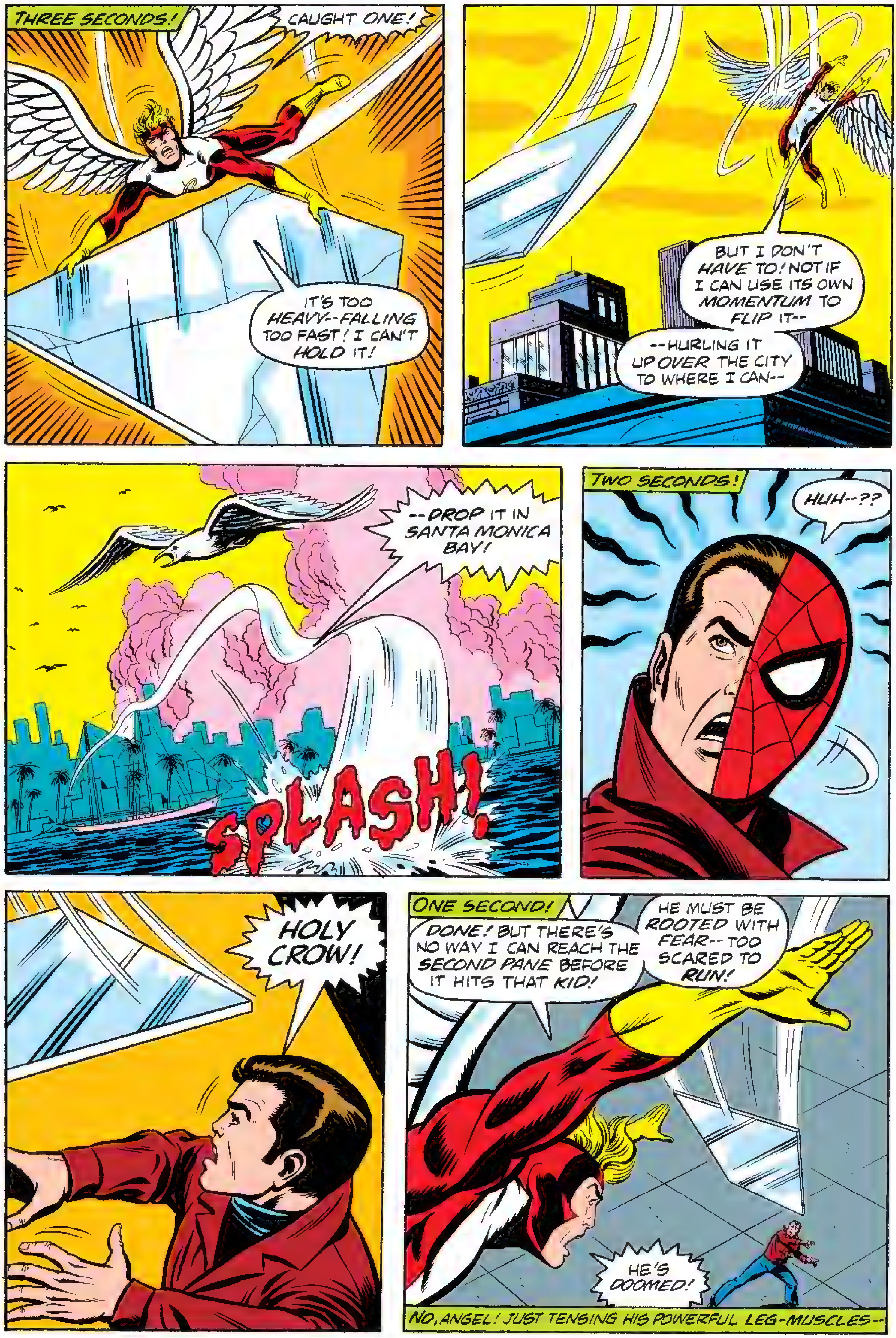

CRIPES! A GUY COULD GET A STIFF NECK AT THIS JOB!
IF WE SAVE EVEN ONE LIFE WHILE THEY'RE BOARDING THIS BUILDING UP-- IT'S WORTH IT!
NOW CHECK THE FIFTEENTH FLOOR AGAIN...

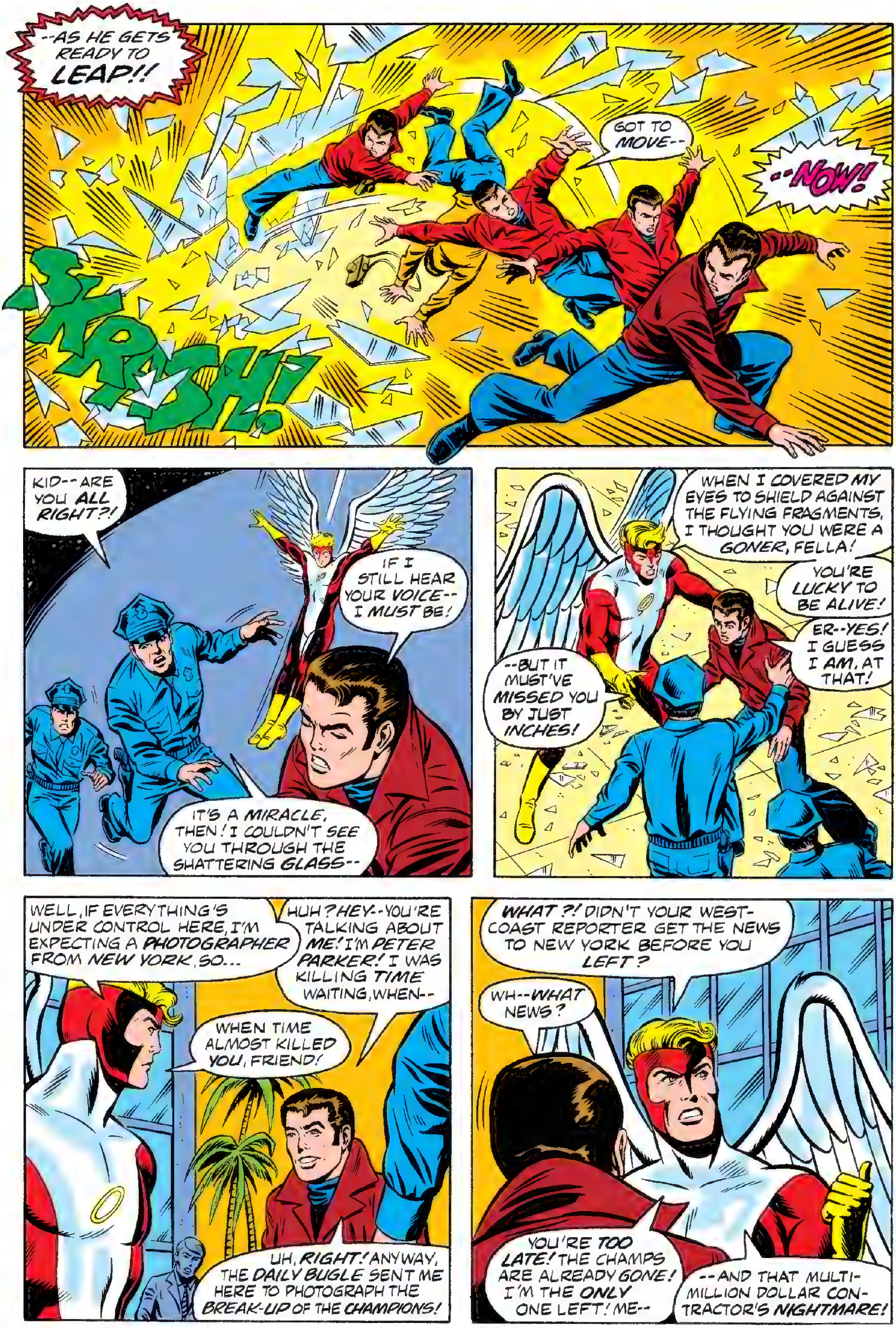

DAVIS! SOUTH SIDE OFFICES! TWO WINDOWS!
I SEE 'EM-- AND RIGHT OVER THE PLAZA! LORD, ONLY EIGHT SECONDS--

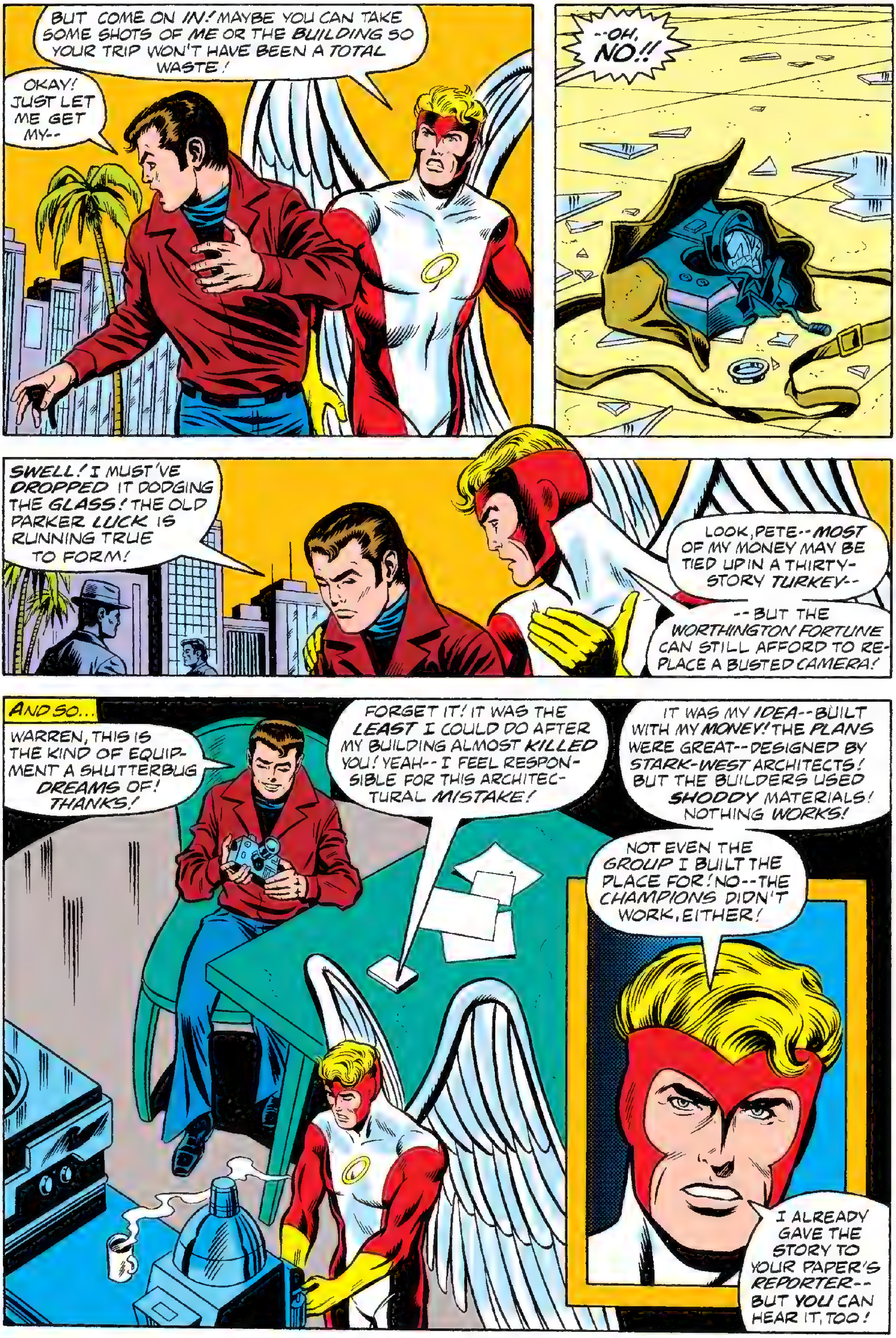

"--FROM THE TIME THEY BEGIN TO CRACK AS THEY POP FROM THEIR FRAMES--
"--TO THE TIME THEY SHATTER ON THE PAVEMENT!"
KERRRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAKKKKKKKKKKKK

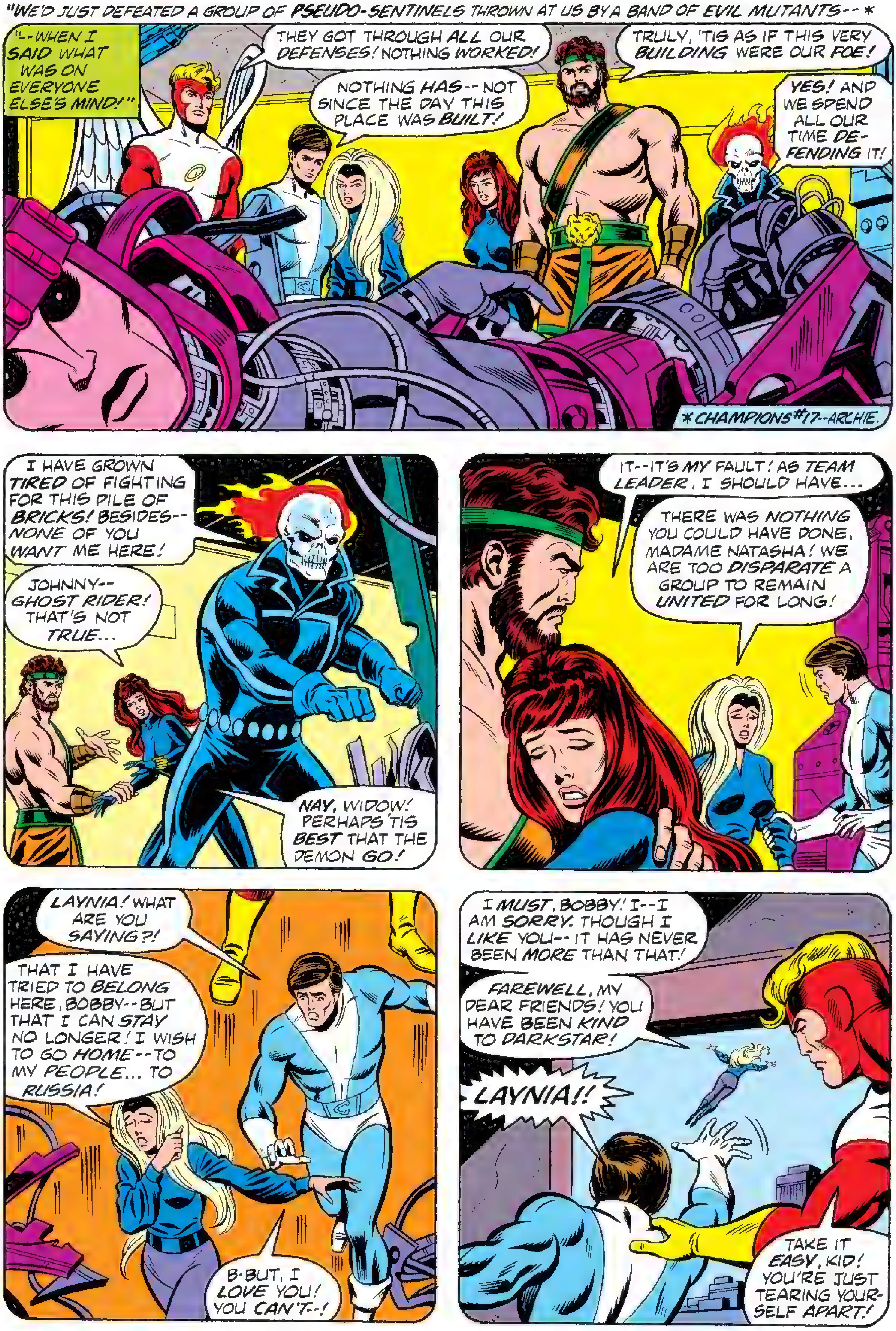

FALL THEY DO, LIKE LEAVES IN A WIND-- THOUGH EACH PANE WEIGHS HUNDREDS OF POUNDS!
ONE CRITICAL SECOND PASSES BEFORE THE MESMERIZED GUARDS CAN REACT...
CLEAR THE PLAZA! RUN!
F-FOR THE LOVE OF HEAVEN!
B-BUT, WHICH WAY? THERE'S NO TELLING WHERE THEY'LL HIT!
AND STILL PETER PARKER, LOST IN HIS THOUGHTS, DOESN'T HEAR!

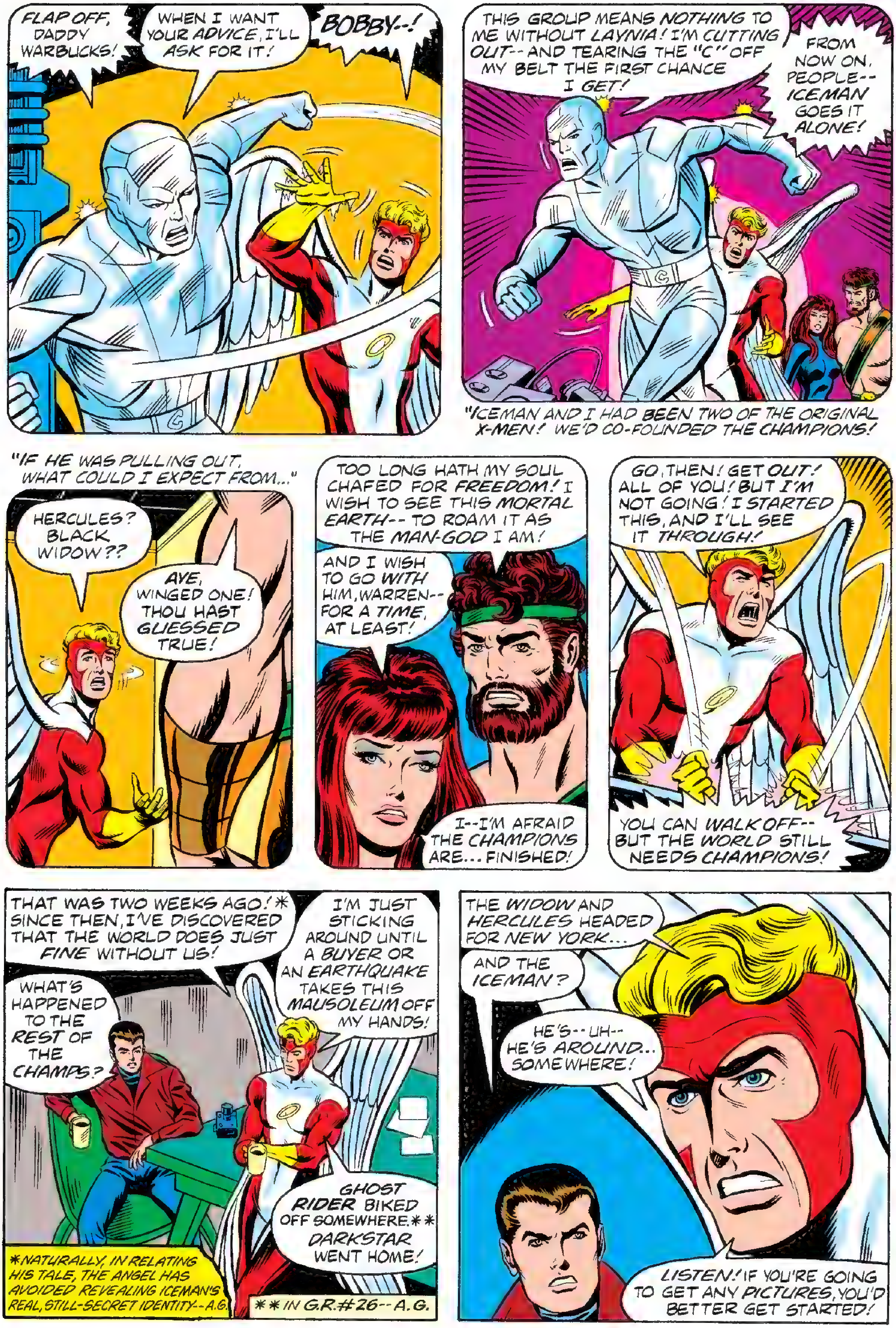

TWO SECONDS GONE, WHEN A COLORFUL FIGURE APPEARS AT THE NOW-WINDOWLESS WINDOW...
NO! IT--IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN!
HALF A SECOND TO SLIP THE RESTRAINING HARNESS ABOUT HIS CHEST...
GOOD THING I HADN'T FINISHED DRESSING IN MY CIVVIES! SHEDDING THIS GADGET TAKES LONG ENOUGH!
ANOTHER HALF-SECOND FOR MIGHTY WINGS TO SPREAD...
AND, WITH BUT FIVE SECONDS TO GO--
--WARREN WORTHINGTON III SWOOPS DOWN FROM THE FIFTEENTH FLOOR OF THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING--
--IN A BREATH-TAKING RACE AGAINST DEATH!
AND IT IS CLEAR TO THE AWESTRUCK ONLOOKERS WHY MEN HAVE NAMED HIM... THE AVENGING ANGEL!
FOUR SECONDS!
I'VE GOT A FEW MINUTES TO KILL! GUESS I'LL TAKE SOME SHOTS OF THE PLAZA!
IT--IT'S VEERING THIS WAY! TOWARDS THAT KID WITH THE CAMERA!
KID! YOU GOT A DEATH WISH? WAKE UP!

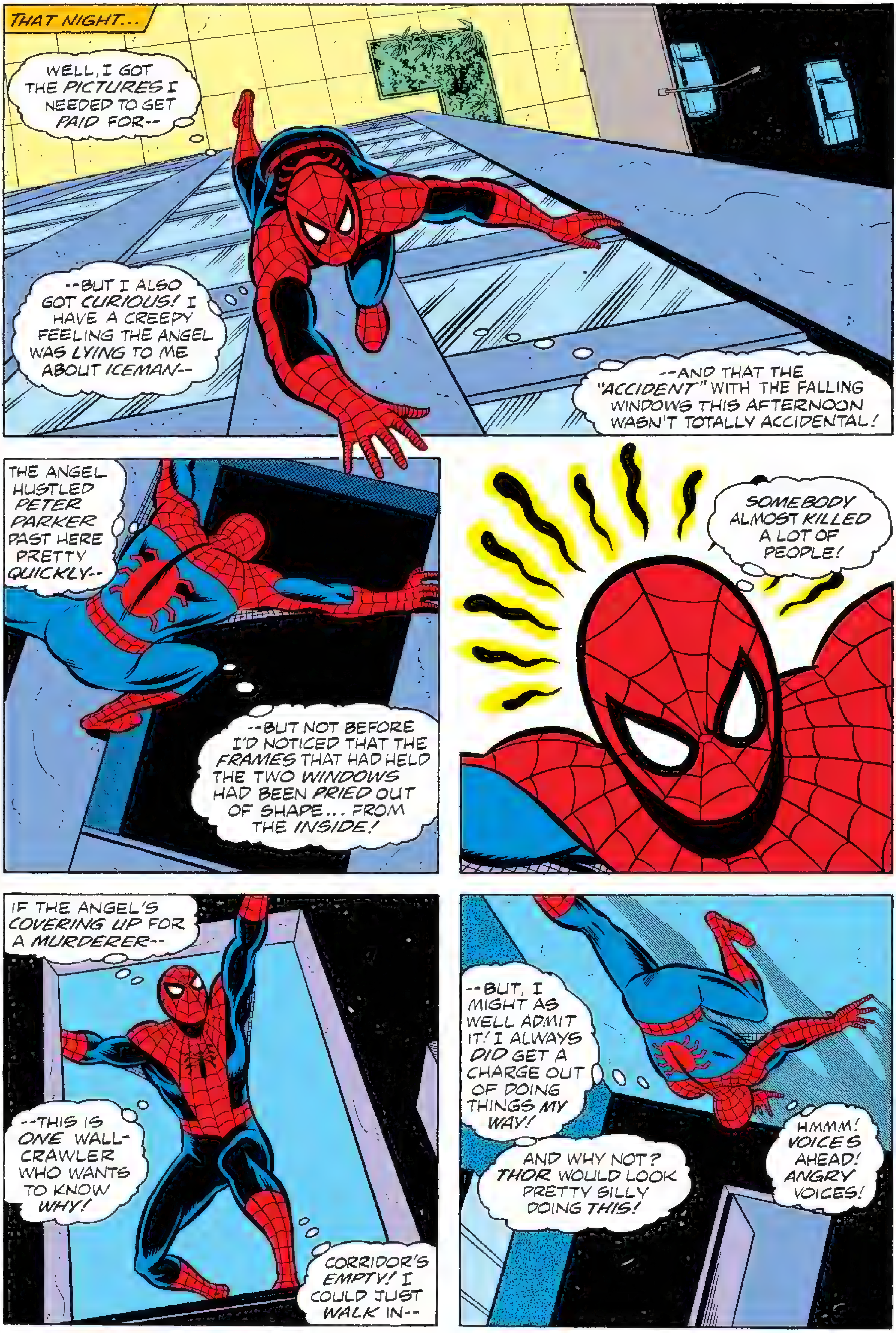

THREE SECONDS!
CAUGHT ONE!
IT'S TOO HEAVY--FALLING TOO FAST! I CAN'T HOLD IT!
BUT I DON'T HAVE TO! NOT IF I CAN USE ITS OWN MOMENTUM TO FLIP IT--
--HURLING IT UP OVER THE CITY TO WHERE I CAN--
--DROP IT IN SANTA MONICA BAY!
SPLASH!
TWO SECONDS!
HUH--??
HOLY CROW!
ONE SECOND!
DONE! BUT THERE'S NO WAY I CAN REACH THE SECOND PANE BEFORE IT HITS THAT KID!
HE MUST BE ROOTED WITH FEAR--TOO SCARED TO RUN!
HE'S DOOMED!
NO, ANGEL! JUST TENSING HIS POWERFUL LEG-MUSCLES--

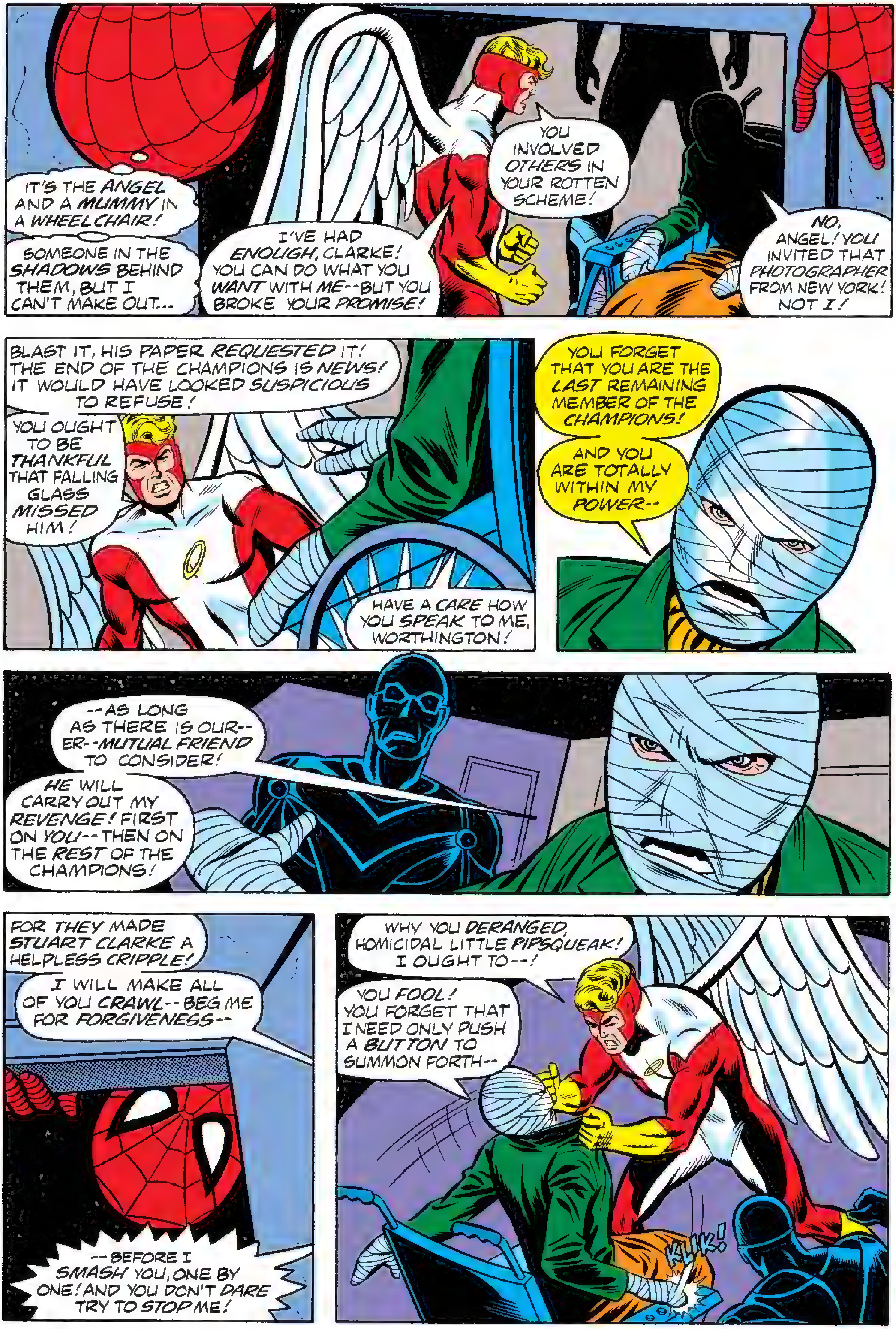

--AS HE GETS READY TO LEAP!!
GOT TO MOVE--
--NOW!
KRASH!
KID--ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
IF I STILL HEAR YOUR VOICE-- I MUST BE!
IT'S A MIRACLE, THEN! I COULDN'T SEE YOU THROUGH THE SHATTERING GLASS--
WHEN I COVERED MY EYES TO SHIELD AGAINST THE FLYING FRAGMENTS, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A GONER, FELLA!
YOU'RE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE!
ER--YES! I GUESS I AM, AT THAT!
--BUT IT MUST'VE MISSED YOU BY JUST INCHES!
WELL, IF EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL HERE, I'M EXPECTING A PHOTOGRAPHER FROM NEW YORK, SO...
HUH? HEY--YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT ME! I'M PETER PARKER! I WAS KILLING TIME WAITING, WHEN--
WHEN TIME ALMOST KILLED YOU, FRIEND!
UH, RIGHT! ANYWAY, THE DAILY BUGLE SENT ME HERE TO PHOTOGRAPH THE BREAK-UP OF THE CHAMPIONS!
WHAT?! DIDN'T YOUR WEST-COAST REPORTER GET THE NEWS TO NEW YORK BEFORE YOU LEFT?
WH--WHAT NEWS?
YOU'RE TOO LATE! THE CHAMPS ARE ALREADY GONE! I'M THE ONLY ONE LEFT! ME--
--AND THAT MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR CONTRACTOR'S NIGHTMARE!

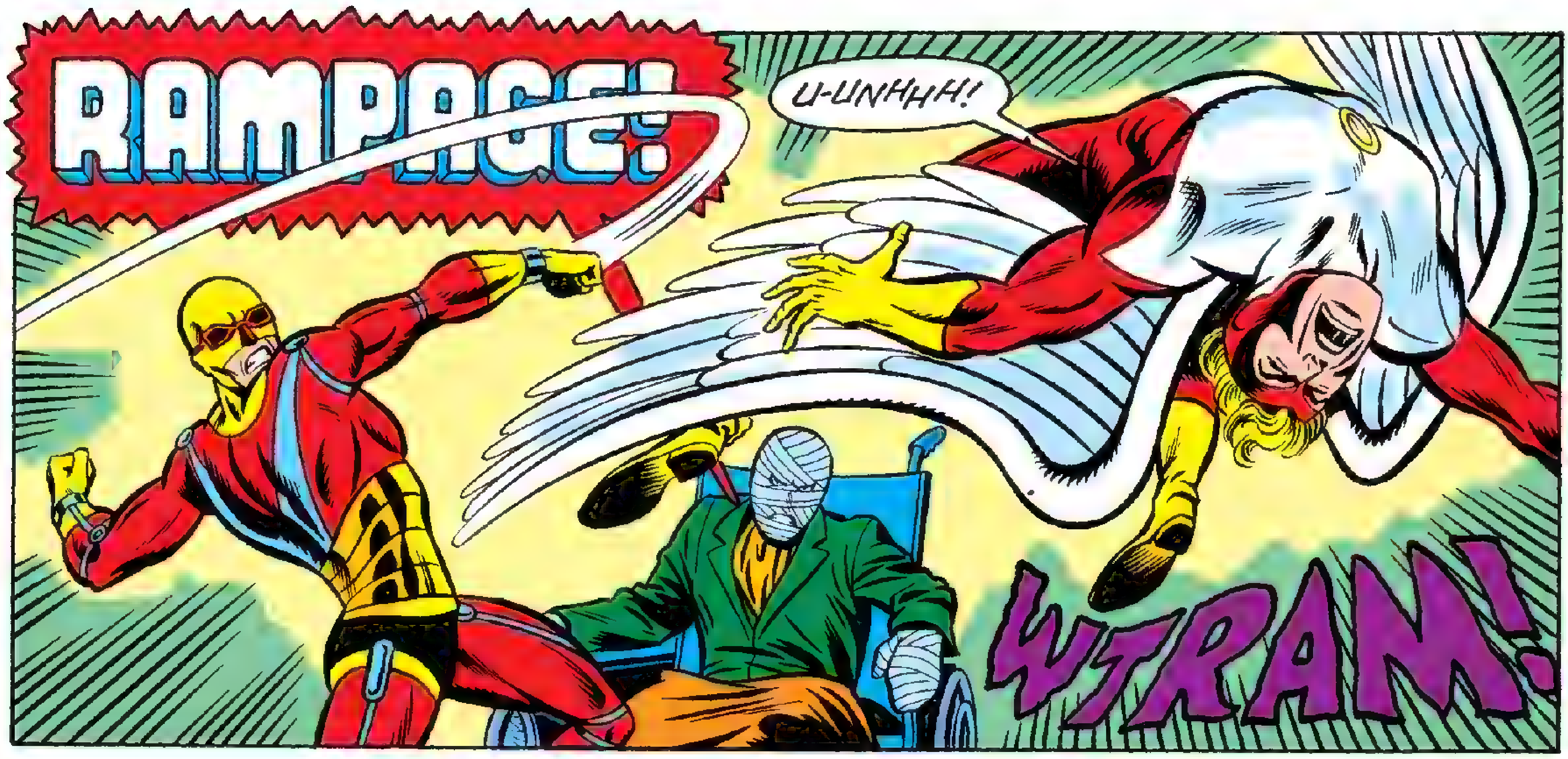

BUT COME ON IN! MAYBE YOU CAN TAKE SOME SHOTS OF ME OR THE BUILDING SO YOUR TRIP WON'T HAVE BEEN A TOTAL WASTE!
OKAY! JUST LET ME GET MY--
--OH, NO!!
SWELL! I MUST'VE DROPPED IT DODGING THE GLASS! THE OLD PARKER LUCK IS RUNNING TRUE TO FORM!
LOOK, PETE--MOST OF MY MONEY MAY BE TIED UP IN A THIRTY-STORY TURKEY--
--BUT THE WORTHINGTON FORTUNE CAN STILL AFFORD TO REPLACE A BUSTED CAMERA!
AND SO...
WARREN, THIS IS THE KIND OF EQUIPMENT A SHUTTERBUG DREAMS OF! THANKS!
FORGET IT! IT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO AFTER MY BUILDING ALMOST KILLED YOU! YEAH--I FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ARCHITECTURAL MISTAKE!
IT WAS MY IDEA--BUILT WITH MY MONEY! THE PLANS WERE GREAT--DESIGNED BY STARK-WEST ARCHITECTS! BUT THE BUILDERS USED SHODDY MATERIALS! NOTHING WORKS!
NOT EVEN THE GROUP I BUILT THE PLACE FOR! NO--THE CHAMPIONS DIDN'T WORK, EITHER!
I ALREADY GAVE THE STORY TO YOUR PAPER'S REPORTER--BUT YOU CAN HEAR IT, TOO!

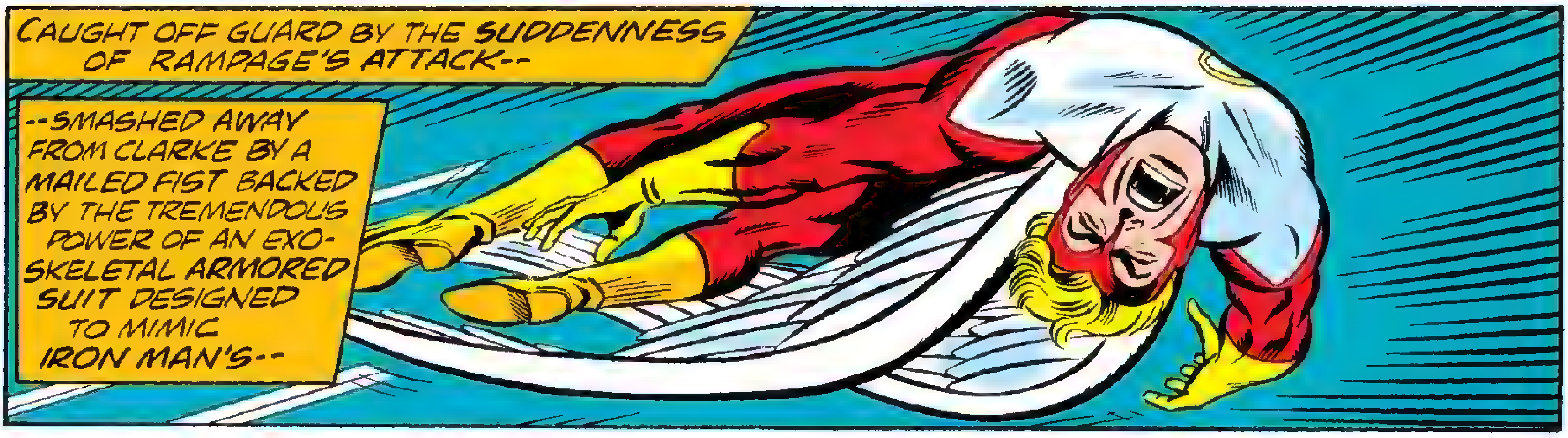

"WE'D JUST DEFEATED A GROUP OF PSEUDO-SENTINELS THROWN AT US BY A BAND OF EVIL MUTANTS-- *
"--WHEN I SAID WHAT WAS ON EVERYONE ELSE'S MIND!"
THEY GOT THROUGH ALL OUR DEFENSES! NOTHING WORKED!
NOTHING HAS-- NOT SINCE THE DAY THIS PLACE WAS BUILT!
TRULY, 'TIS AS IF THIS VERY BUILDING WERE OUR FOE!
YES! AND WE SPEND ALL OUR TIME DEFENDING IT!
* CHAMPIONS #17--ARCHIE.
I HAVE GROWN TIRED OF FIGHTING FOR THIS PILE OF BRICKS! BESIDES-- NONE OF YOU WANT ME HERE!
JOHNNY-- GHOST RIDER! THAT'S NOT TRUE...
NAY, WIDOW! PERHAPS 'TIS BEST THAT THE DEMON GO!
IT--IT'S MY FAULT! AS TEAM LEADER, I SHOULD HAVE...
THERE WAS NOTHING YOU COULD HAVE DONE, MADAME NATASHA! WE ARE TOO DISPARATE A GROUP TO REMAIN UNITED FOR LONG!
LAYNIA! WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
THAT I HAVE TRIED TO BELONG HERE, BOBBY--BUT THAT I CAN STAY NO LONGER! I WISH TO GO HOME--TO MY PEOPLE... TO RUSSIA!
B-BUT, I LOVE YOU! YOU CAN'T--!
I MUST, BOBBY! I--I AM SORRY. THOUGH I LIKE YOU-- IT HAS NEVER BEEN MORE THAN THAT!
FAREWELL, MY DEAR FRIENDS! YOU HAVE BEEN KIND TO DARKSTAR!
LAYNIA!!
TAKE IT EASY, KID! YOU'RE JUST TEARING YOURSELF APART!


FLAP OFF, DADDY WARBUCKS!
WHEN I WANT YOUR ADVICE, I'LL ASK FOR IT!
BOBBY--!
THIS GROUP MEANS NOTHING TO ME WITHOUT LAYNIA! I'M CUTTING OUT-- AND TEARING THE "C" OFF MY BELT THE FIRST CHANCE I GET!
FROM NOW ON, PEOPLE-- ICEMAN GOES IT ALONE!
"ICEMAN AND I HAD BEEN TWO OF THE ORIGINAL X-MEN! WE'D CO-FOUNDED THE CHAMPIONS!
"IF HE WAS PULLING OUT, WHAT COULD I EXPECT FROM..."
HERCULES? BLACK WIDOW??
AYE, WINGED ONE! THOU HAST GUESSED TRUE!
TOO LONG HATH MY SOUL CHAFED FOR FREEDOM! I WISH TO SEE THIS MORTAL EARTH-- TO ROAM IT AS THE MAN-GOD I AM!
AND I WISH TO GO WITH HIM, WARREN-- FOR A TIME, AT LEAST!
I--I'M AFRAID THE CHAMPIONS ARE... FINISHED!
GO, THEN! GET OUT! ALL OF YOU! BUT I'M NOT GOING! I STARTED THIS, AND I'LL SEE IT THROUGH!
YOU CAN WALK OFF-- BUT THE WORLD STILL NEEDS CHAMPIONS!
THAT WAS TWO WEEKS AGO!* SINCE THEN, I'VE DISCOVERED THAT THE WORLD DOES JUST FINE WITHOUT US!
I'M JUST STICKING AROUND UNTIL A BUYER OR AN EARTHQUAKE TAKES THIS MAUSOLEUM OFF MY HANDS!
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE REST OF THE CHAMPS?
GHOST RIDER BIKED OFF SOMEWHERE.** DARKSTAR WENT HOME!
*NATURALLY, IN RELATING HIS TALE, THE ANGEL HAS AVOIDED REVEALING ICEMAN'S REAL, STILL-SECRET IDENTITY--A.G.
**IN G.R. #26--A.G.
THE WIDOW AND HERCULES HEADED FOR NEW YORK...
AND THE ICEMAN?
HE'S--UH-- HE'S AROUND... SOMEWHERE!
LISTEN! IF YOU'RE GOING TO GET ANY PICTURES, YOU'D BETTER GET STARTED!

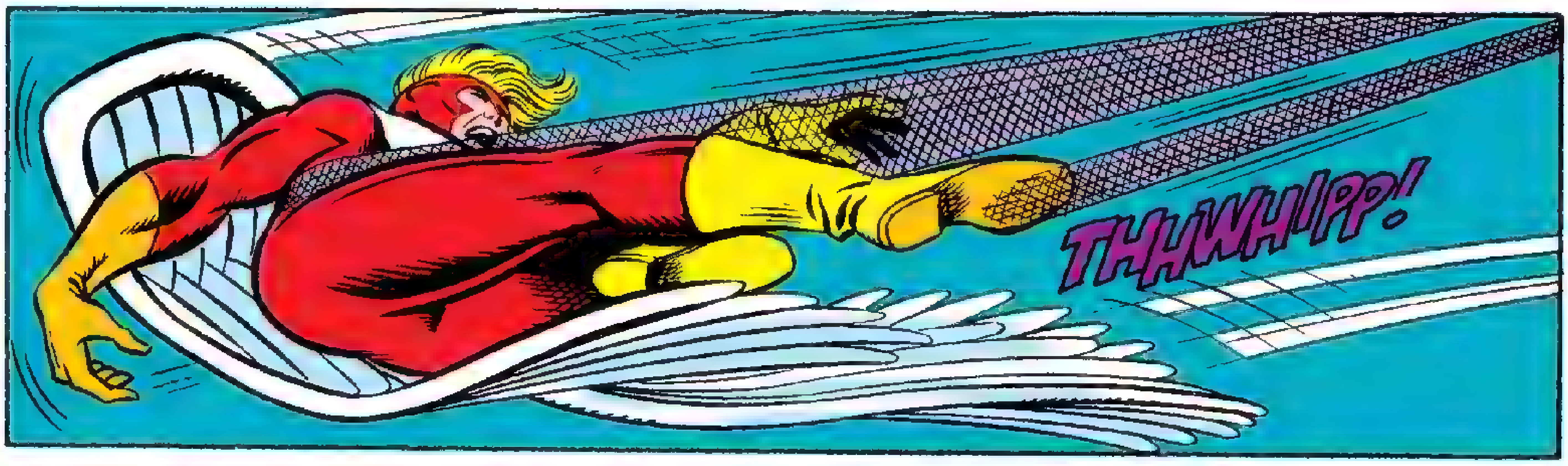

THAT NIGHT...
WELL, I GOT THE *PICTURES* I NEEDED TO GET *PAID* FOR--
--BUT I ALSO GOT *CURIOUS!* I HAVE A CREEPY FEELING THE ANGEL WAS *LYING* TO ME ABOUT *ICEMAN*--
--AND THAT THE *"ACCIDENT"* WITH THE FALLING WINDOWS THIS AFTERNOON WASN'T TOTALLY ACCIDENTAL!
THE ANGEL HUSTLED *PETER PARKER* PAST HERE PRETTY *QUICKLY*--
--BUT NOT BEFORE I'D NOTICED THAT THE *FRAMES* THAT HAD HELD THE TWO *WINDOWS* HAD BEEN *PRIED* OUT OF SHAPE... FROM THE *INSIDE!*
SOMEBODY ALMOST *KILLED* A LOT OF PEOPLE!
IF THE ANGEL'S *COVERING UP* FOR A *MURDERER*--
--THIS IS *ONE* WALL-CRAWLER WHO WANTS TO KNOW *WHY!*
CORRIDOR'S *EMPTY!* I COULD JUST *WALK* IN--
--BUT, I MIGHT AS WELL ADMIT IT! I ALWAYS *DID* GET A CHARGE OUT OF DOING THINGS *MY WAY!*
AND WHY NOT? *THOR* WOULD LOOK PRETTY SILLY DOING *THIS!*
HMMM! *VOICES* AHEAD! *ANGRY* VOICES!

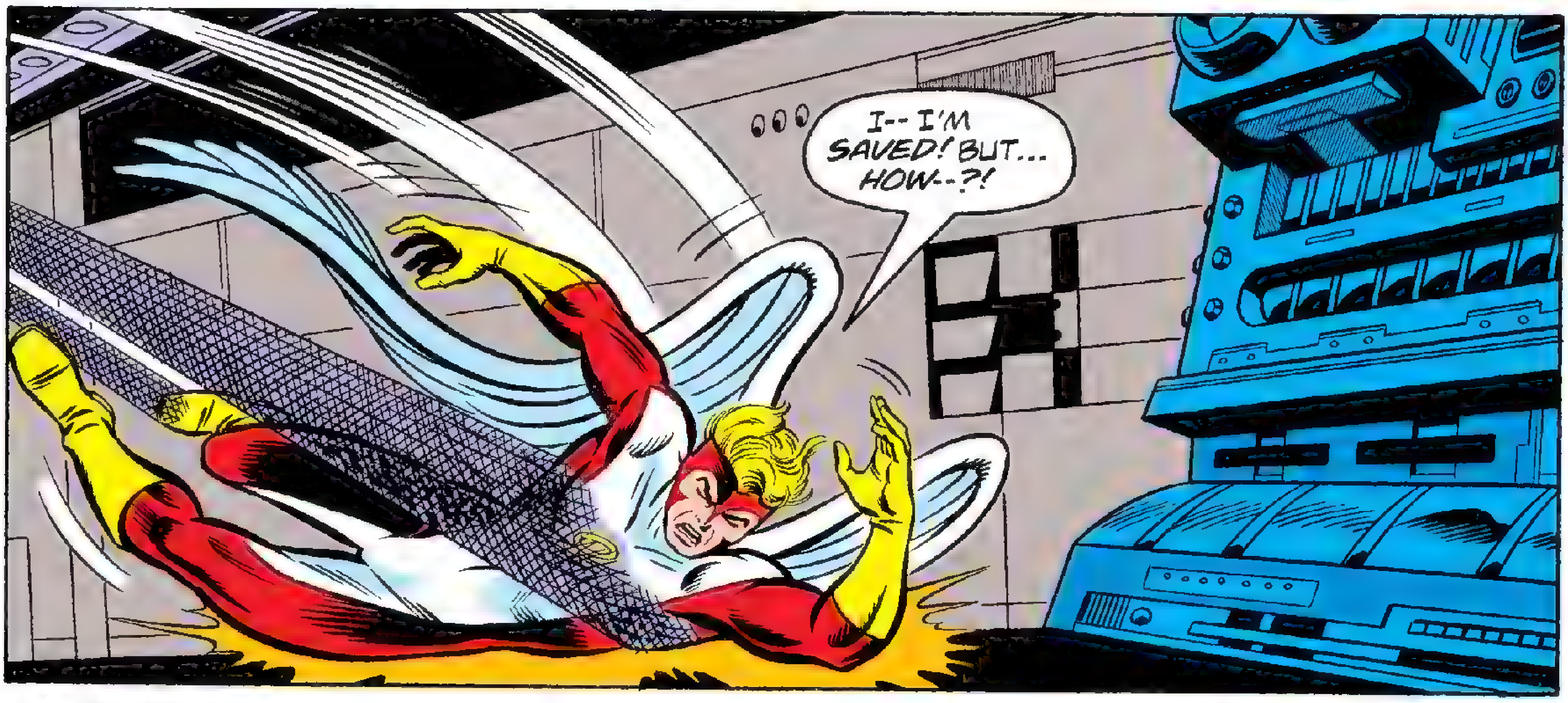

IT'S THE ANGEL AND A MUMMY IN A WHEELCHAIR!
SOMEONE IN THE SHADOWS BEHIND THEM, BUT I CAN'T MAKE OUT...
I'VE HAD ENOUGH, CLARKE! YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT WITH ME--BUT YOU BROKE YOUR PROMISE!
YOU INVOLVED OTHERS IN YOUR ROTTEN SCHEME!
NO, ANGEL! YOU INVITED THAT PHOTOGRAPHER FROM NEW YORK! NOT I!
BLAST IT, HIS PAPER REQUESTED IT! THE END OF THE CHAMPIONS IS NEWS! IT WOULD HAVE LOOKED SUSPICIOUS TO REFUSE!
YOU OUGHT TO BE THANKFUL THAT FALLING GLASS MISSED HIM!
HAVE A CARE HOW YOU SPEAK TO ME, WORTHINGTON!
YOU FORGET THAT YOU ARE THE LAST REMAINING MEMBER OF THE CHAMPIONS!
AND YOU ARE TOTALLY WITHIN MY POWER--
--AS LONG AS THERE IS OUR--ER--MUTUAL FRIEND TO CONSIDER!
HE WILL CARRY OUT MY REVENGE! FIRST ON YOU--THEN ON THE REST OF THE CHAMPIONS!
FOR THEY MADE STUART CLARKE A HELPLESS CRIPPLE!
I WILL MAKE ALL OF YOU CRAWL--BEG ME FOR FORGIVENESS--
--BEFORE I SMASH YOU, ONE BY ONE! AND YOU DON'T DARE TRY TO STOP ME!
WHY YOU DERANGED, HOMICIDAL LITTLE PIPSQUEAK! I OUGHT TO--!
YOU FOOL! YOU FORGET THAT I NEED ONLY PUSH A BUTTON TO SUMMON FORTH--
KLIK!

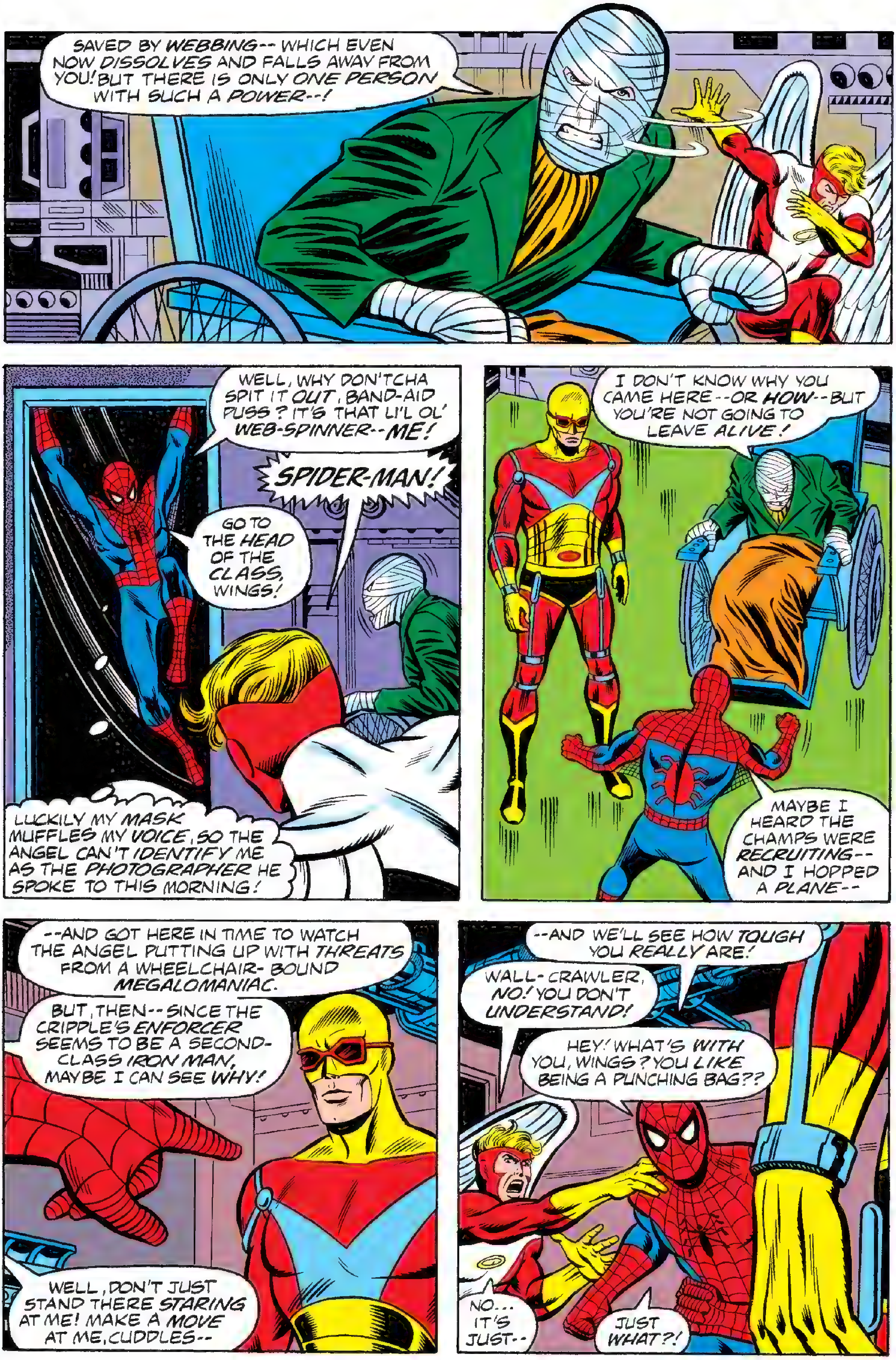

RAMPAGE!
U-UNHHH!
WTRAM!

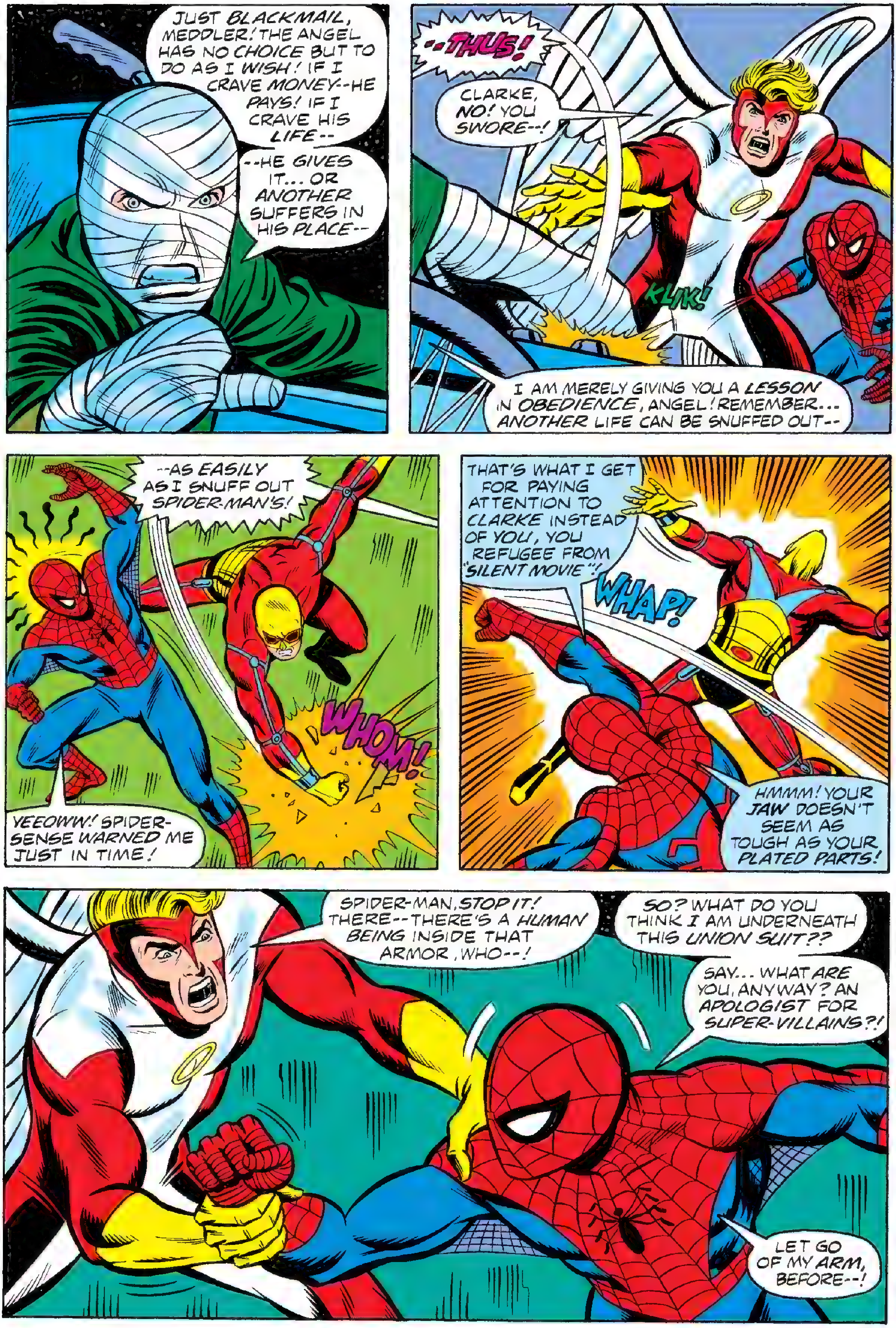

CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY THE SUDDENNESS OF RAMPAGE'S ATTACK--
--SMASHED AWAY FROM CLARKE BY A MAILED FIST BACKED BY THE TREMENDOUS POWER OF AN EXO-SKELETAL ARMORED SUIT DESIGNED TO MIMIC IRON MAN'S--

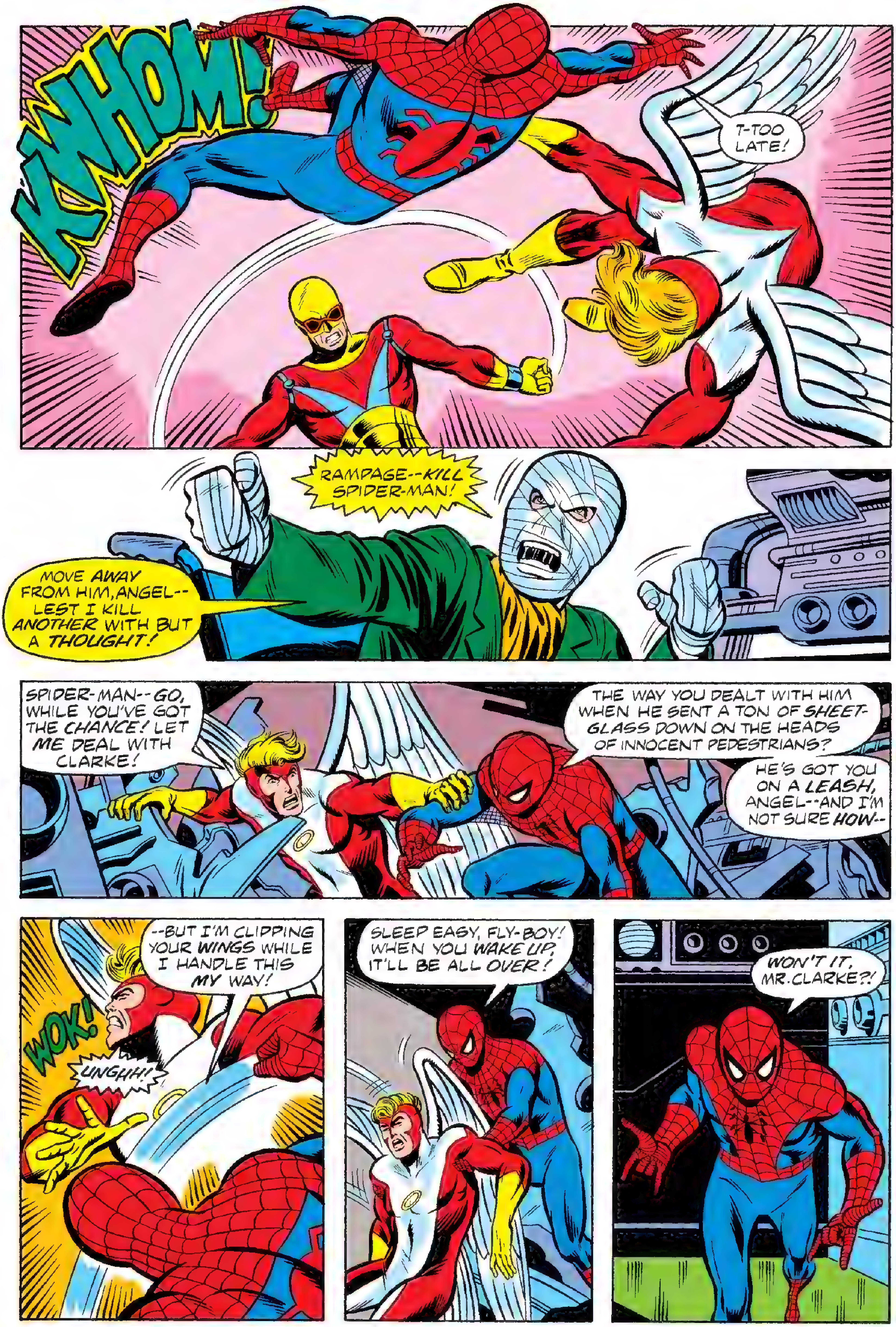
--THE ANGEL HURTLES, UNABLE TO BRAKE WITH HIS WINGS, TOWARDS THE WALL AND CERTAIN DEATH, WHEN...

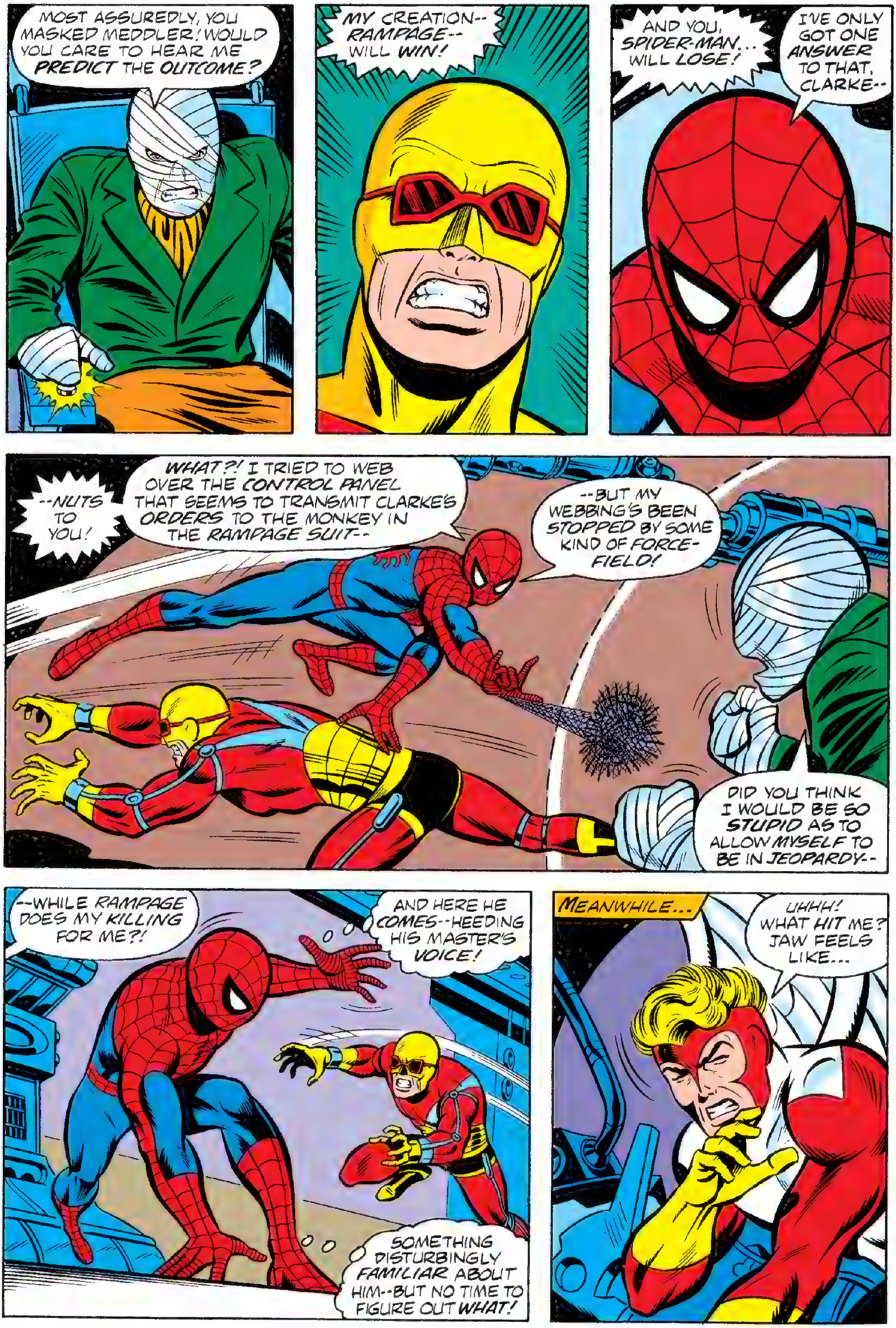


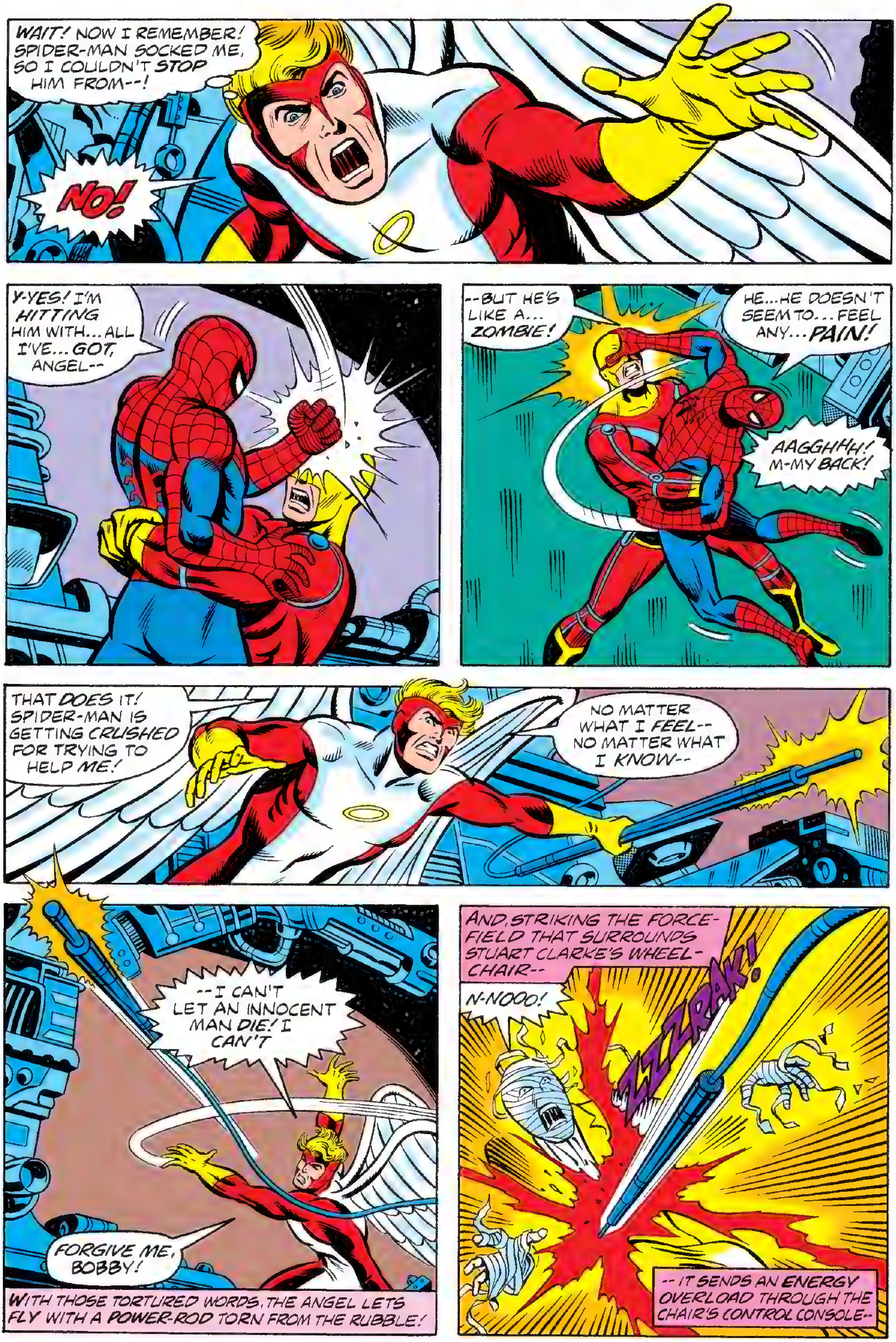

I-- I'M SAVED! BUT... HOW--?!

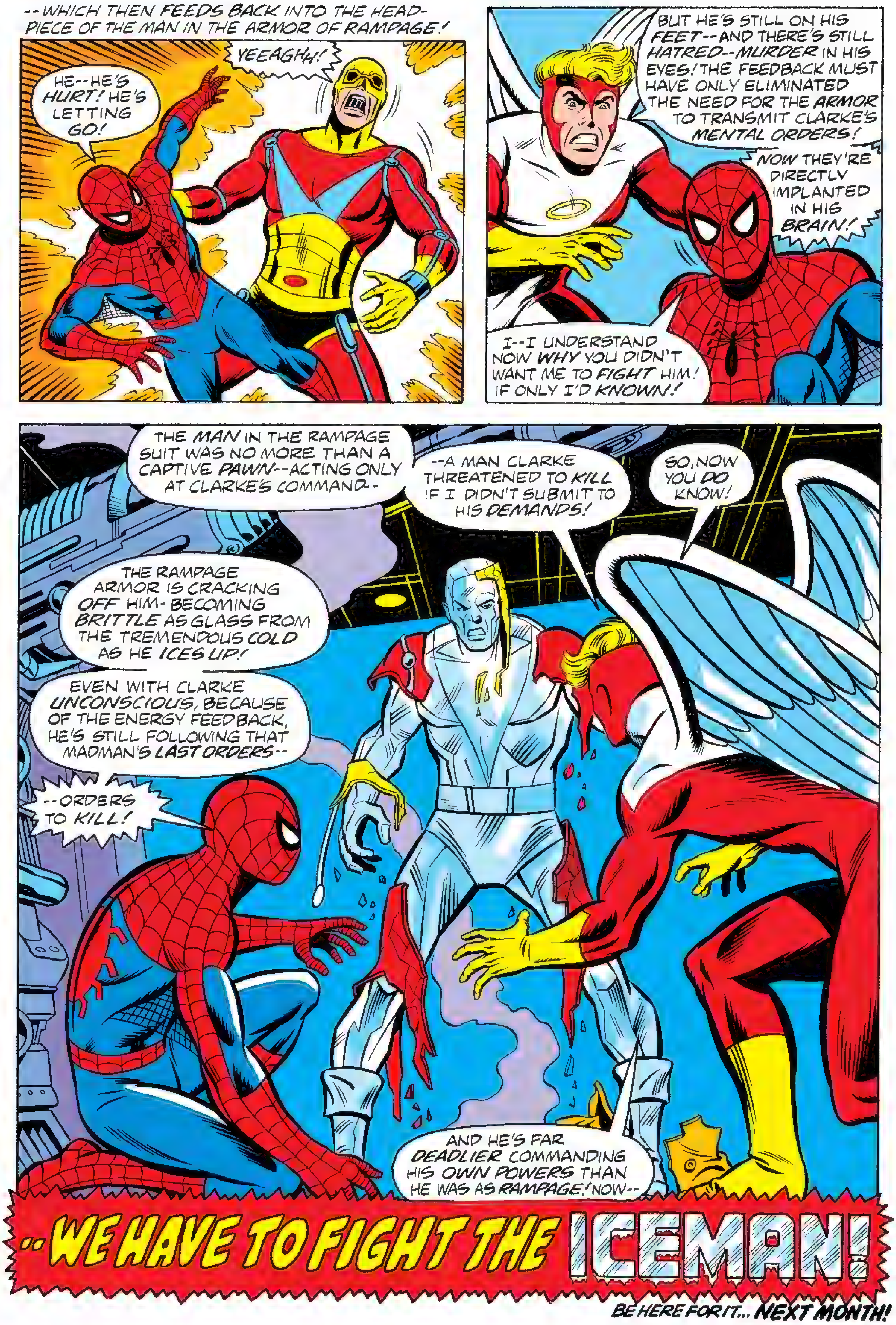

SAVED BY WEBBING-- WHICH EVEN NOW DISSOLVES AND FALLS AWAY FROM YOU! BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON WITH SUCH A POWER--!
WELL, WHY DON'TCHA SPIT IT OUT, BAND-AID PUSS? IT'S THAT LI'L OL' WEB-SPINNER--ME!
SPIDER-MAN!
GO TO THE HEAD OF THE CLASS, WINGS!
LUCKILY MY MASK MUFFLES MY VOICE, SO THE ANGEL CAN'T IDENTIFY ME AS THE PHOTOGRAPHER HE SPOKE TO THIS MORNING!
I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU CAME HERE--OR HOW--BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LEAVE ALIVE!
MAYBE I HEARD THE CHAMPS WERE RECRUITING-- AND I HOPPED A PLANE--
--AND GOT HERE IN TIME TO WATCH THE ANGEL PUTTING UP WITH THREATS FROM A WHEELCHAIR-BOUND MEGALOMANIAC.
BUT, THEN--SINCE THE CRIPPLE'S ENFORCER SEEMS TO BE A SECOND-CLASS IRON MAN, MAYBE I CAN SEE WHY!
WELL, DON'T JUST STAND THERE STARING AT ME! MAKE A MOVE AT ME, CUDDLES--
--AND WE'LL SEE HOW TOUGH YOU REALLY ARE!
WALL-CRAWLER, NO! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!
HEY! WHAT'S WITH YOU, WINGS? YOU LIKE BEING A PUNCHING BAG??
NO... IT'S JUST--
JUST WHAT?!


JUST BLACKMAIL, MEDDLER! THE ANGEL HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO DO AS I WISH! IF I CRAVE MONEY--HE PAYS! IF I CRAVE HIS LIFE--
--HE GIVES IT... OR ANOTHER SUFFERS IN HIS PLACE--
--THUS!
CLARKE, NO! YOU SWORE--!
KLIK!
I AM MERELY GIVING YOU A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE, ANGEL! REMEMBER... ANOTHER LIFE CAN BE SNUFFED OUT--
--AS EASILY AS I SNUFF OUT SPIDER-MAN'S!
WHOM!
YEEOWW! SPIDER-SENSE WARNED ME JUST IN TIME!
THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR PAYING ATTENTION TO CLARKE INSTEAD OF YOU, YOU REFUGEE FROM "SILENT MOVIE"!
WHAP!
HMMM! YOUR JAW DOESN'T SEEM AS TOUGH AS YOUR PLATED PARTS!
SPIDER-MAN, STOP IT! THERE--THERE'S A HUMAN BEING INSIDE THAT ARMOR, WHO--!
SO? WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM UNDERNEATH THIS UNION SUIT??
SAY... WHAT ARE YOU, ANYWAY? AN APOLOGIST FOR SUPER-VILLAINS?!
LET GO OF MY ARM, BEFORE--!


KHOM!
T-TOO LATE!
RAMPAGE--KILL SPIDER-MAN!
MOVE AWAY FROM HIM, ANGEL--LEST I KILL ANOTHER WITH BUT A THOUGHT!
SPIDER-MAN--GO, WHILE YOU'VE GOT THE CHANCE! LET ME DEAL WITH CLARKE!
THE WAY YOU DEALT WITH HIM WHEN HE SENT A TON OF SHEET-GLASS DOWN ON THE HEADS OF INNOCENT PEDESTRIANS?
HE'S GOT YOU ON A LEASH, ANGEL--AND I'M NOT SURE HOW--
--BUT I'M CLIPPING YOUR WINGS WHILE I HANDLE THIS MY WAY!
WOK!
UNGHH!
SLEEP EASY, FLY-BOY! WHEN YOU WAKE UP, IT'LL BE ALL OVER!
WON'T IT, MR. CLARKE?!


MOST ASSUREDLY, YOU MASKED MEDDLER! WOULD YOU CARE TO HEAR ME *PREDICT* THE *OUTCOME*?
MY CREATION-- RAMPAGE-- WILL *WIN!*
AND YOU, *SPIDER-MAN...* WILL *LOSE!*
I'VE ONLY GOT ONE *ANSWER* TO THAT, CLARKE--
--*NUTS* TO YOU!
WHAT?! I TRIED TO WEB OVER THE *CONTROL PANEL* THAT SEEMS TO TRANSMIT CLARKE'S *ORDERS* TO THE MONKEY IN THE *RAMPAGE SUIT*--
--BUT MY WEBBING'S BEEN *STOPPED* BY SOME KIND OF *FORCE-FIELD!*
DID YOU THINK I WOULD BE SO *STUPID* AS TO ALLOW *MYSELF* TO BE IN *JEOPARDY*--
--WHILE *RAMPAGE* DOES MY *KILLING* FOR ME?!
AND HERE HE *COMES*--HEEDING HIS MASTER'S *VOICE!*
SOMETHING DISTURBINGLY *FAMILIAR* ABOUT HIM--BUT NO TIME TO FIGURE OUT *WHAT!*
MEANWHILE...
UHHH! WHAT *HIT* ME? JAW FEELS LIKE...


WAIT! NOW I REMEMBER! SPIDER-MAN SOCKED ME, SO I COULDN'T STOP HIM FROM--!
NO!
Y-YES! I'M HITTING HIM WITH... ALL I'VE... GOT, ANGEL--
--BUT HE'S LIKE A... ZOMBIE!
HE... HE DOESN'T SEEM TO... FEEL ANY... PAIN!
AAGGHHH! M-MY BACK!
THAT DOES IT! SPIDER-MAN IS GETTING CRUSHED FOR TRYING TO HELP ME!
NO MATTER WHAT I FEEL-- NO MATTER WHAT I KNOW--
--I CAN'T LET AN INNOCENT MAN DIE! I CAN'T
FORGIVE ME, BOBBY!
WITH THOSE TORTURED WORDS, THE ANGEL LETS FLY WITH A POWER-ROD TORN FROM THE RUBBLE!
AND, STRIKING THE FORCE-FIELD THAT SURROUNDS STUART CLARKE'S WHEEL-CHAIR--
N-NOOO!
ZZZRAK!
--IT SENDS AN ENERGY OVERLOAD THROUGH THE CHAIR'S CONTROL CONSOLE--


--WHICH THEN FEEDS BACK INTO THE HEAD-PIECE OF THE MAN IN THE ARMOR OF RAMPAGE!
YEEAGHH!
HE--HE'S HURT! HE'S LETTING GO!
BUT HE'S STILL ON HIS FEET--AND THERE'S STILL HATRED--MURDER IN HIS EYES! THE FEEDBACK MUST HAVE ONLY ELIMINATED THE NEED FOR THE ARMOR TO TRANSMIT CLARKE'S MENTAL ORDERS!
NOW THEY'RE DIRECTLY IMPLANTED IN HIS BRAIN!
I--I UNDERSTAND NOW WHY YOU DIDN'T WANT ME TO FIGHT HIM! IF ONLY I'D KNOWN!
THE MAN IN THE RAMPAGE SUIT WAS NO MORE THAN A CAPTIVE PAWN--ACTING ONLY AT CLARKE'S COMMAND--
--A MAN CLARKE THREATENED TO KILL IF I DIDN'T SUBMIT TO HIS DEMANDS!
SO, NOW YOU DO KNOW!
THE RAMPAGE ARMOR IS CRACKING OFF HIM- BECOMING BRITTLE AS GLASS FROM THE TREMENDOUS COLD AS HE ICES UP!
EVEN WITH CLARKE UNCONSCIOUS, BECAUSE OF THE ENERGY FEEDBACK, HE'S STILL FOLLOWING THAT MADMAN'S LAST ORDERS--
--ORDERS TO KILL!
AND HE'S FAR DEADLIER COMMANDING HIS OWN POWERS THAN HE WAS AS RAMPAGE! NOW--
--WE HAVE TO FIGHT THE ICEMAN!
BE HERE FOR IT... NEXT MONTH!

THE SPECTACULAR SPIDERMAN ®
35¢
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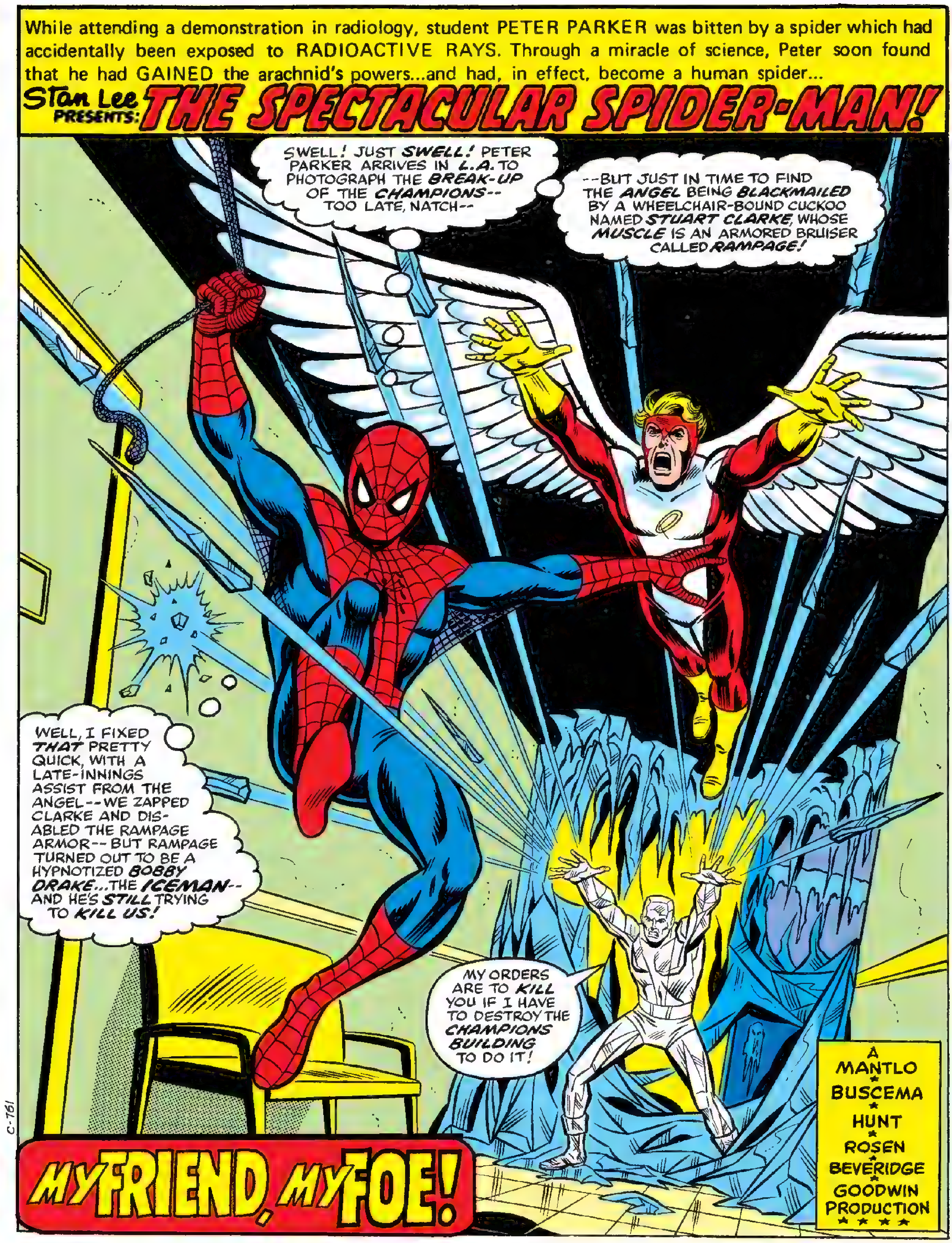
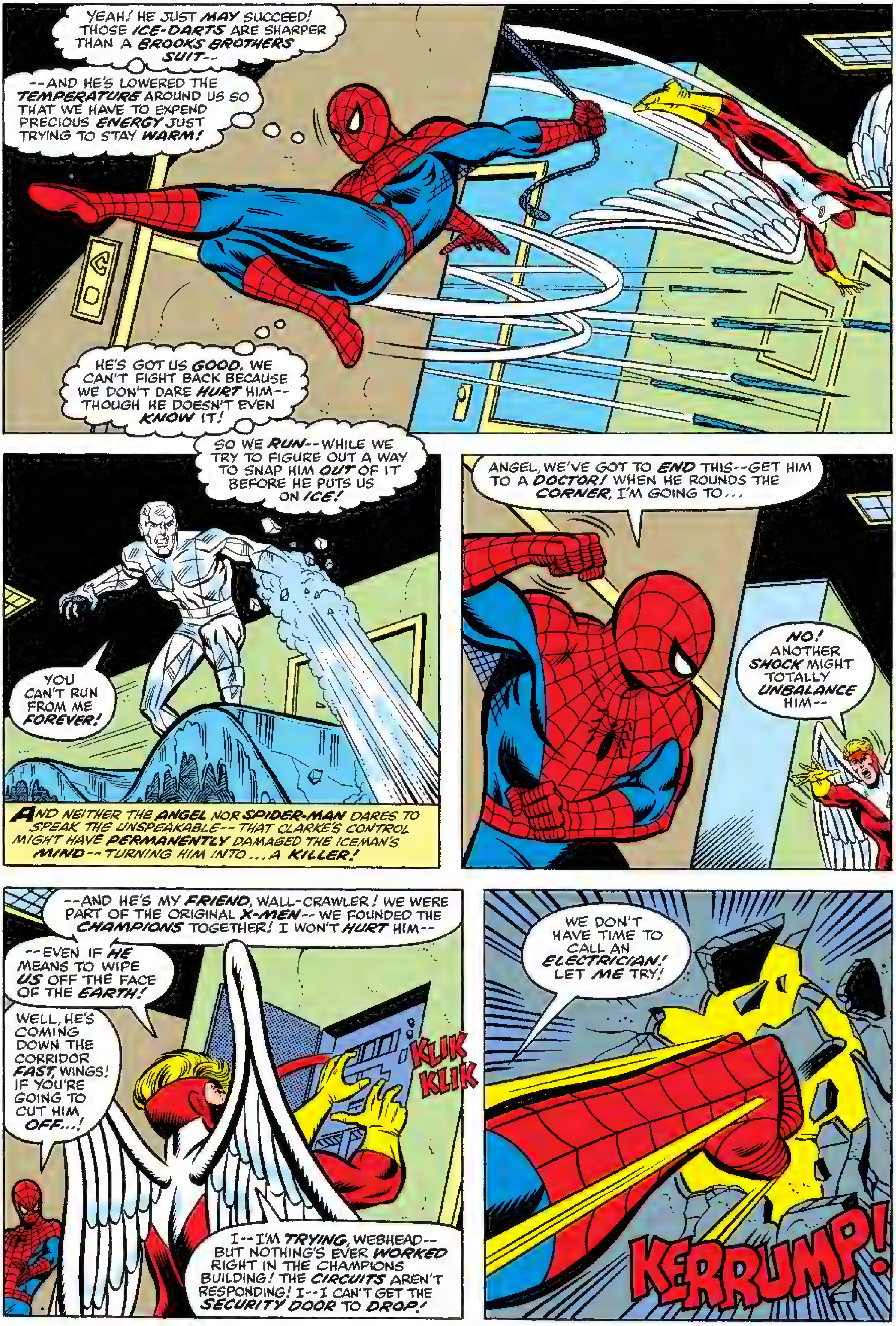
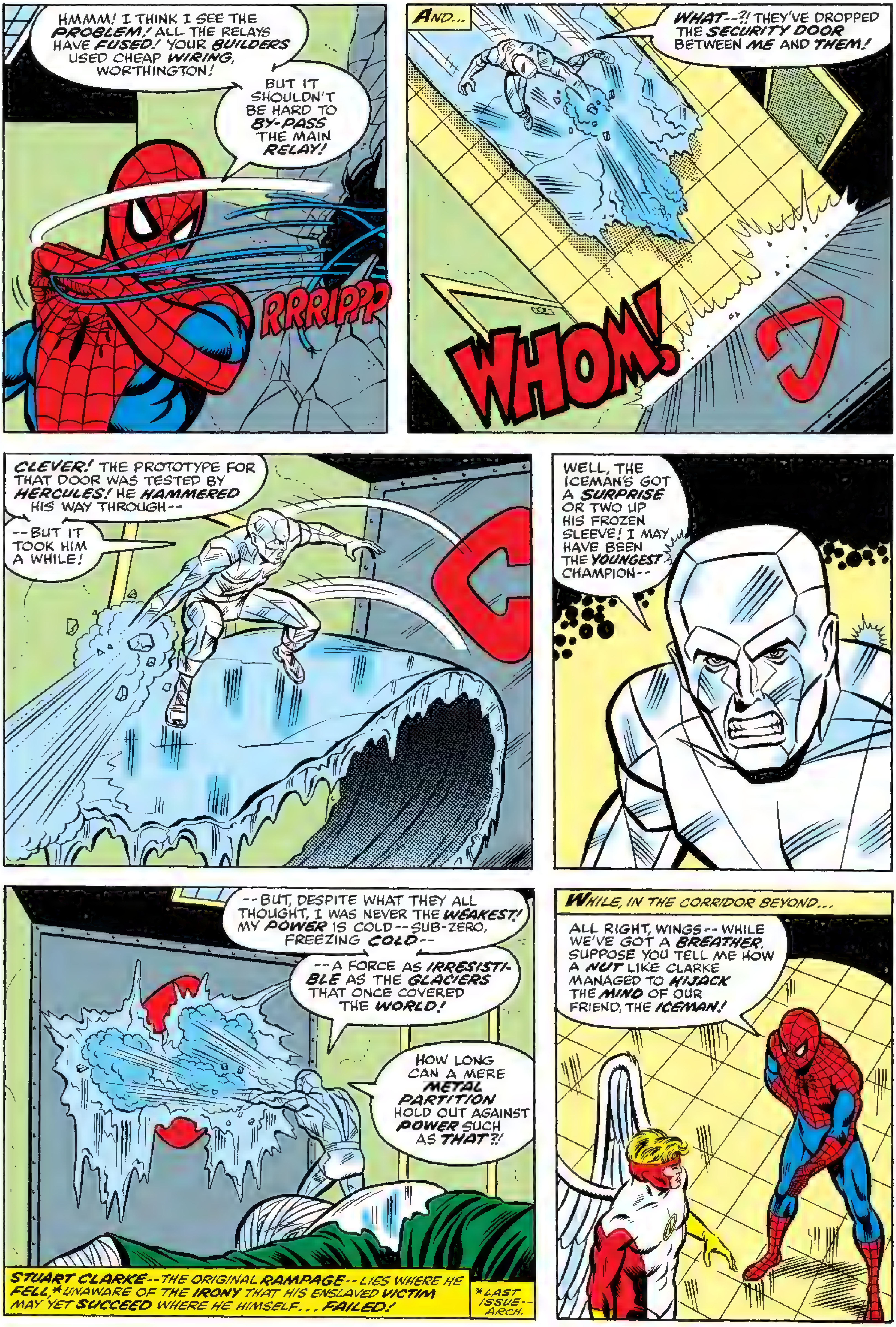
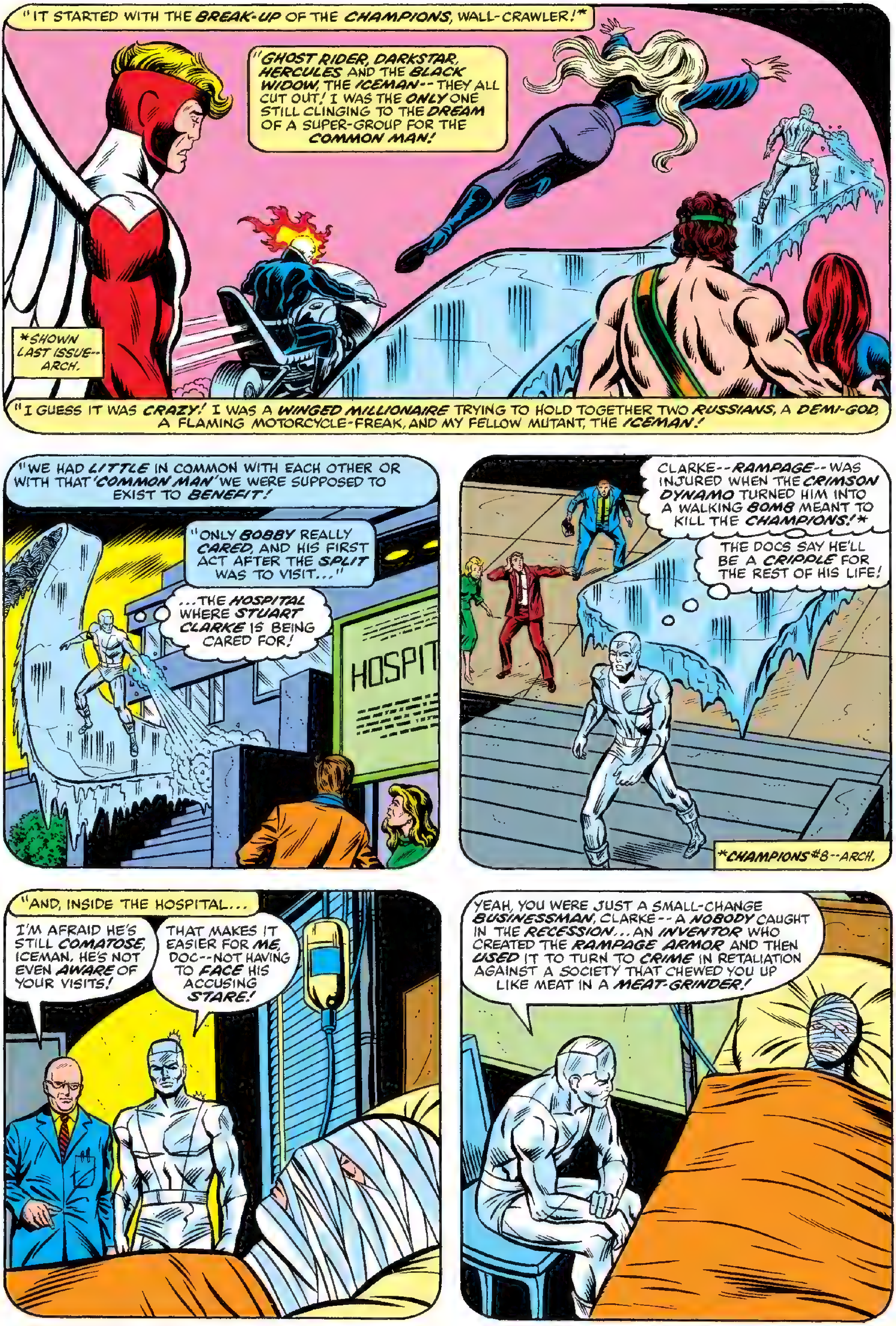
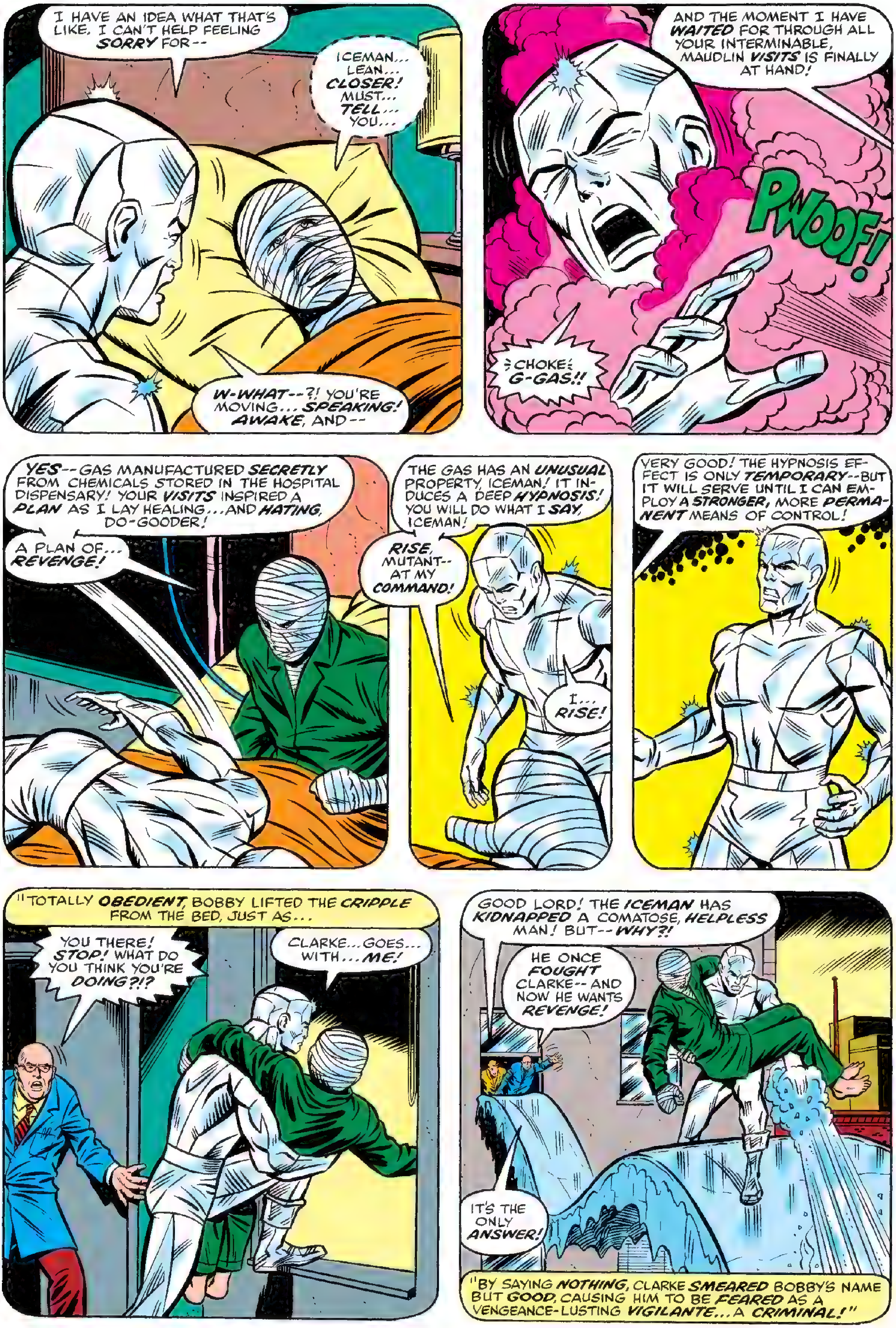
PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN®
A CHAMPION GONE MAD!
NEITHER SPIDEY NOR THE AVENGING ANGEL CAN STEM THE ICEMAN'S FURY!
COLD RAGE, SWIFT DOOM!

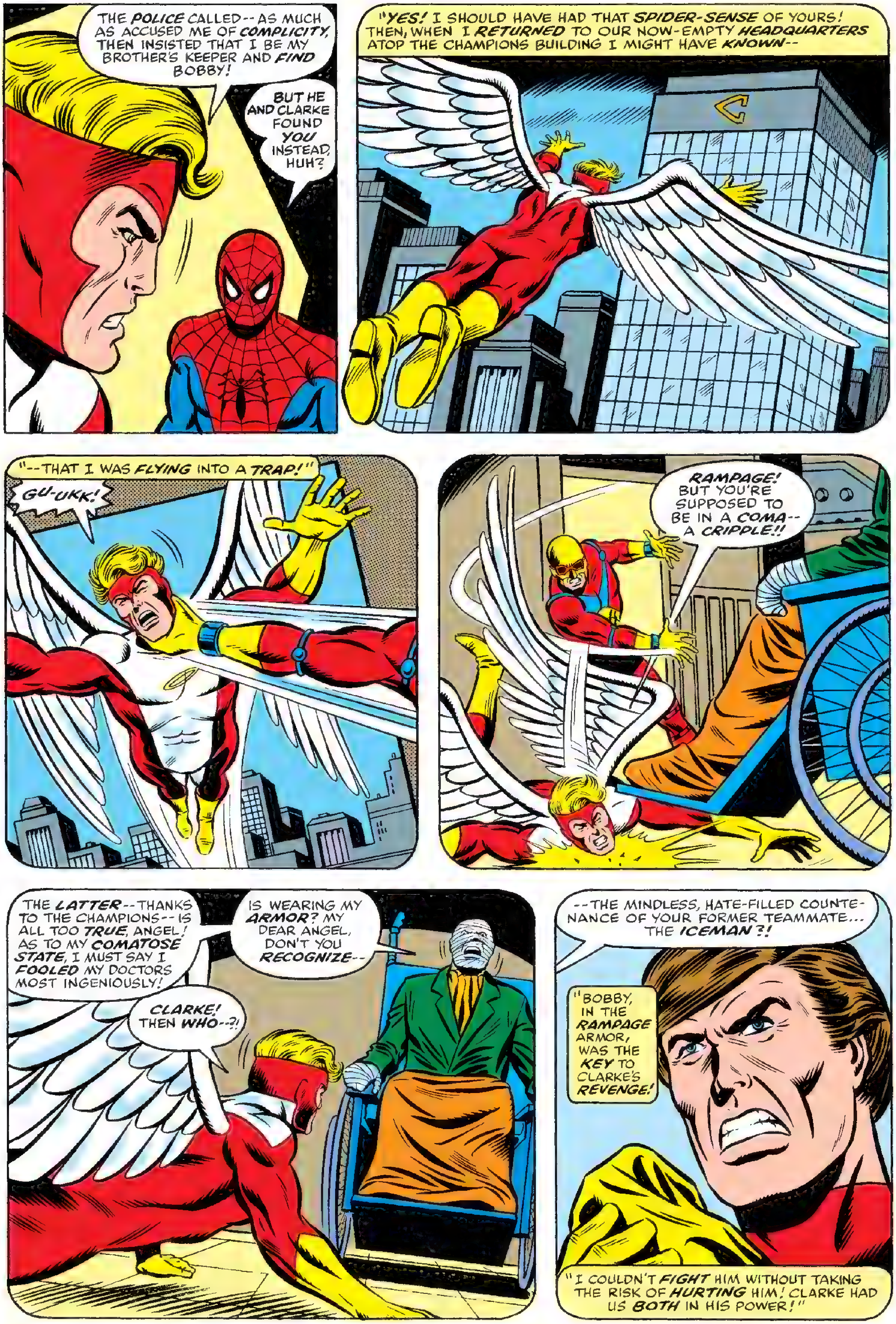

While attending a demonstration in radiology, student PETER PARKER was bitten by a spider which had accidentally been exposed to RADIOACTIVE RAYS. Through a miracle of science, Peter soon found that he had GAINED the arachnid's powers...and had, in effect, become a human spider...
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN!
SWELL! JUST SWELL! PETER PARKER ARRIVES IN L.A. TO PHOTOGRAPH THE BREAK-UP OF THE CHAMPIONS-- TOO LATE, NATCH--
--BUT JUST IN TIME TO FIND THE ANGEL BEING BLACKMAILED BY A WHEELCHAIR-BOUND CUCKOO NAMED STUART CLARKE, WHOSE MUSCLE IS AN ARMORED BRUISER CALLED RAMPAGE!
WELL, I FIXED THAT PRETTY QUICK, WITH A LATE-INNINGS ASSIST FROM THE ANGEL--WE ZAPPED CLARKE AND DISABLED THE RAMPAGE ARMOR-- BUT RAMPAGE TURNED OUT TO BE A HYPNOTIZED BOBBY DRAKE...THE ICEMAN-- AND HE'S STILL TRYING TO KILL US!
MY ORDERS ARE TO KILL YOU IF I HAVE TO DESTROY THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING TO DO IT!
C-761
MY FRIEND, MY FOE!
A MANTLO ★ BUSCEMA ★ HUNT ★ ROSEN ★ BEVERIDGE ★ GOODWIN PRODUCTION ★ ★ ★ ★

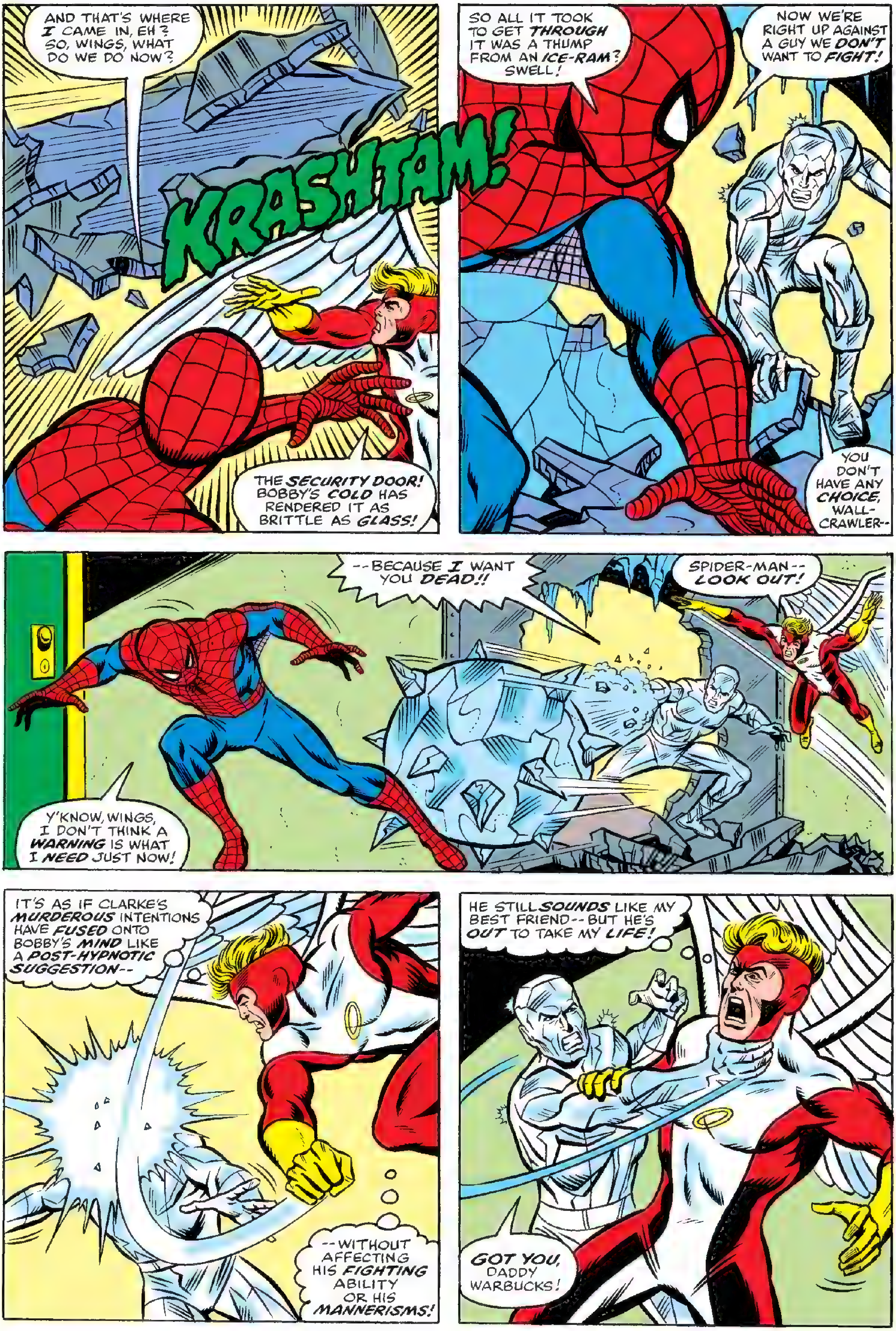

YEAH! HE JUST *MAY* SUCCEED! THOSE *ICE-DARTS* ARE SHARPER THAN A *BROOKS BROTHERS SUIT*--
--AND HE'S LOWERED THE *TEMPERATURE* AROUND US SO THAT WE HAVE TO EXPEND PRECIOUS *ENERGY* JUST TRYING TO STAY *WARM!*
HE'S GOT US *GOOD.* WE CAN'T FIGHT BACK BECAUSE WE DON'T DARE *HURT* HIM--THOUGH HE DOESN'T EVEN *KNOW* IT!
SO WE *RUN*--WHILE WE TRY TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO SNAP HIM *OUT* OF IT BEFORE HE PUTS US ON *ICE!*
YOU CAN'T RUN FROM ME *FOREVER!*
AND NEITHER THE ***ANGEL*** *NOR* ***SPIDER-MAN*** *DARES TO SPEAK THE UNSPEAKABLE--THAT CLARKE'S CONTROL MIGHT HAVE* ***PERMANENTLY*** *DAMAGED THE ICEMAN'S* ***MIND***--*TURNING HIM INTO...A* ***KILLER!***
ANGEL, WE'VE GOT TO *END* THIS--GET HIM TO A *DOCTOR!* WHEN HE ROUNDS THE *CORNER,* I'M GOING TO...
NO! ANOTHER *SHOCK* MIGHT TOTALLY *UNBALANCE* HIM--
--AND HE'S MY *FRIEND,* WALL-CRAWLER! WE WERE PART OF THE ORIGINAL *X-MEN*--WE FOUNDED THE *CHAMPIONS* TOGETHER! I WON'T *HURT* HIM--
--EVEN IF *HE* MEANS TO WIPE *US* OFF THE FACE OF THE *EARTH!*
WELL, HE'S COMING DOWN THE CORRIDOR *FAST,* WINGS! IF YOU'RE GOING TO CUT HIM *OFF...!*
KLIK KLIK
I--I'M *TRYING,* WEBHEAD--BUT NOTHING'S EVER *WORKED* RIGHT IN THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING! THE *CIRCUITS* AREN'T RESPONDING! I--I CAN'T GET THE *SECURITY DOOR* TO *DROP!*
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO CALL AN *ELECTRICIAN!* LET *ME* TRY!
KERRUMP!


HMMM! I THINK I SEE THE PROBLEM! ALL THE RELAYS HAVE FUSED! YOUR BUILDERS USED CHEAP WIRING, WORTHINGTON!
BUT IT SHOULDN'T BE HARD TO BY-PASS THE MAIN RELAY!
RRRIPPP
AND...
WHAT--?! THEY'VE DROPPED THE SECURITY DOOR BETWEEN ME AND THEM!
WHOM!
CLEVER! THE PROTOTYPE FOR THAT DOOR WAS TESTED BY HERCULES! HE HAMMERED HIS WAY THROUGH--
--BUT IT TOOK HIM A WHILE!
WELL, THE ICEMAN'S GOT A SURPRISE OR TWO UP HIS FROZEN SLEEVE! I MAY HAVE BEEN THE YOUNGEST CHAMPION--
--BUT, DESPITE WHAT THEY ALL THOUGHT, I WAS NEVER THE WEAKEST! MY POWER IS COLD--SUB-ZERO, FREEZING COLD--
--A FORCE AS IRRESISTIBLE AS THE GLACIERS THAT ONCE COVERED THE WORLD!
HOW LONG CAN A MERE METAL PARTITION HOLD OUT AGAINST POWER SUCH AS THAT?!
STUART CLARKE--THE ORIGINAL RAMPAGE--LIES WHERE HE FELL,* UNAWARE OF THE IRONY THAT HIS ENSLAVED VICTIM MAY YET SUCCEED WHERE HE HIMSELF... FAILED!
*LAST ISSUE--ARCH.
WHILE, IN THE CORRIDOR BEYOND...
ALL RIGHT, WINGS--WHILE WE'VE GOT A BREATHER, SUPPOSE YOU TELL ME HOW A NUT LIKE CLARKE MANAGED TO HIJACK THE MIND OF OUR FRIEND, THE ICEMAN!

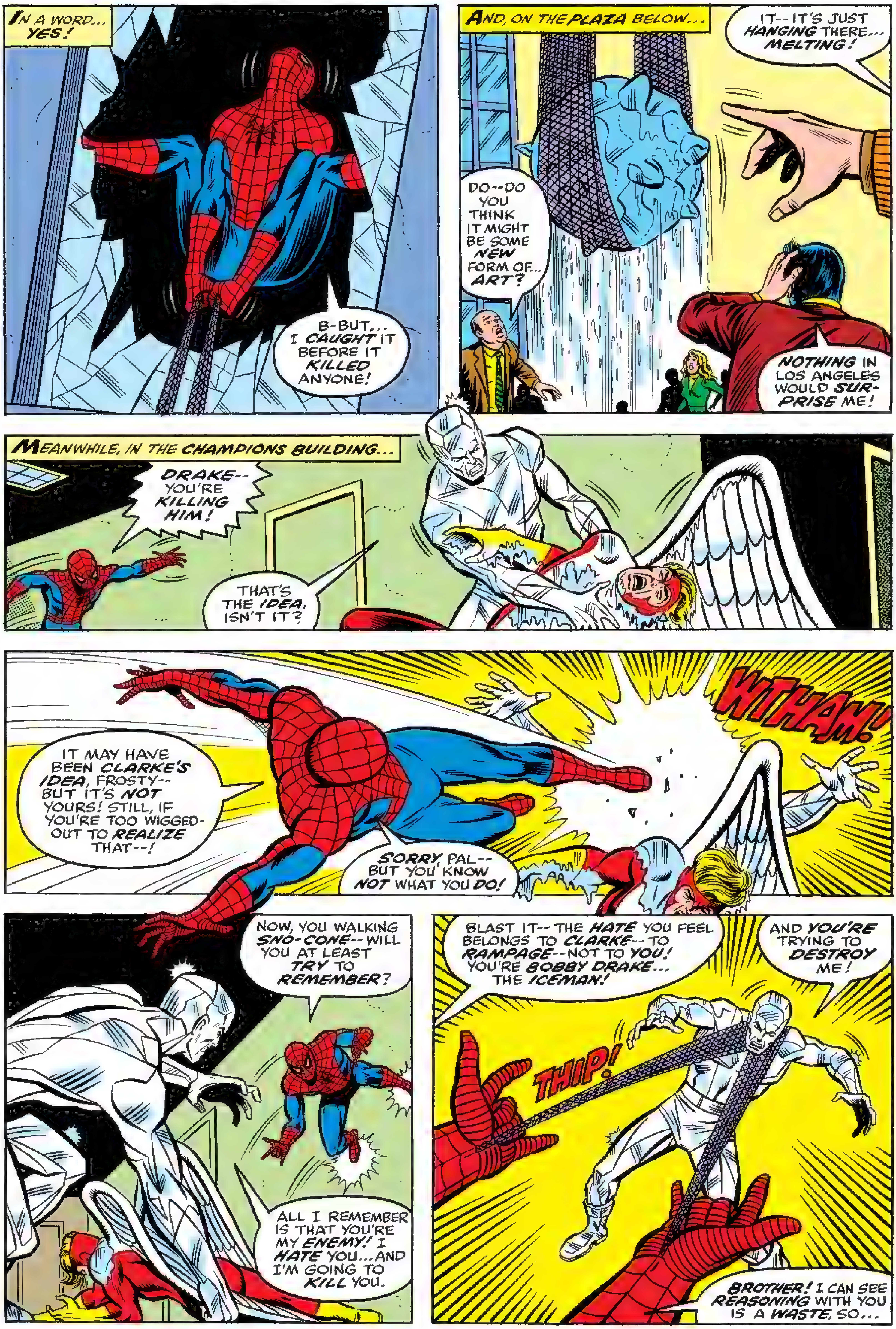

"IT STARTED WITH THE BREAK-UP OF THE CHAMPIONS, WALL-CRAWLER!*
"GHOST RIDER, DARKSTAR, HERCULES AND THE BLACK WIDOW, THE ICEMAN--THEY ALL CUT OUT! I WAS THE ONLY ONE STILL CLINGING TO THE DREAM OF A SUPER-GROUP FOR THE COMMON MAN!
*SHOWN LAST ISSUE--ARCH.
"I GUESS IT WAS CRAZY! I WAS A WINGED MILLIONAIRE TRYING TO HOLD TOGETHER TWO RUSSIANS, A DEMI-GOD, A FLAMING MOTORCYCLE-FREAK, AND MY FELLOW MUTANT, THE ICEMAN!
"WE HAD LITTLE IN COMMON WITH EACH OTHER OR WITH THAT 'COMMON MAN' WE WERE SUPPOSED TO EXIST TO BENEFIT!
"ONLY BOBBY REALLY CARED, AND HIS FIRST ACT AFTER THE SPLIT WAS TO VISIT..."
...THE HOSPITAL WHERE STUART CLARKE IS BEING CARED FOR!
HOSPIT
CLARKE--RAMPAGE--WAS INJURED WHEN THE CRIMSON DYNAMO TURNED HIM INTO A WALKING BOMB MEANT TO KILL THE CHAMPIONS!*
THE DOCS SAY HE'LL BE A CRIPPLE FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE!
*CHAMPIONS #8--ARCH.
"AND, INSIDE THE HOSPITAL...
I'M AFRAID HE'S STILL COMATOSE, ICEMAN. HE'S NOT EVEN AWARE OF YOUR VISITS!
THAT MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME, DOC--NOT HAVING TO FACE HIS ACCUSING STARE!
YEAH, YOU WERE JUST A SMALL-CHANGE BUSINESSMAN, CLARKE--A NOBODY CAUGHT IN THE RECESSION...AN INVENTOR WHO CREATED THE RAMPAGE ARMOR AND THEN USED IT TO TURN TO CRIME IN RETALIATION AGAINST A SOCIETY THAT CHEWED YOU UP LIKE MEAT IN A MEAT-GRINDER!

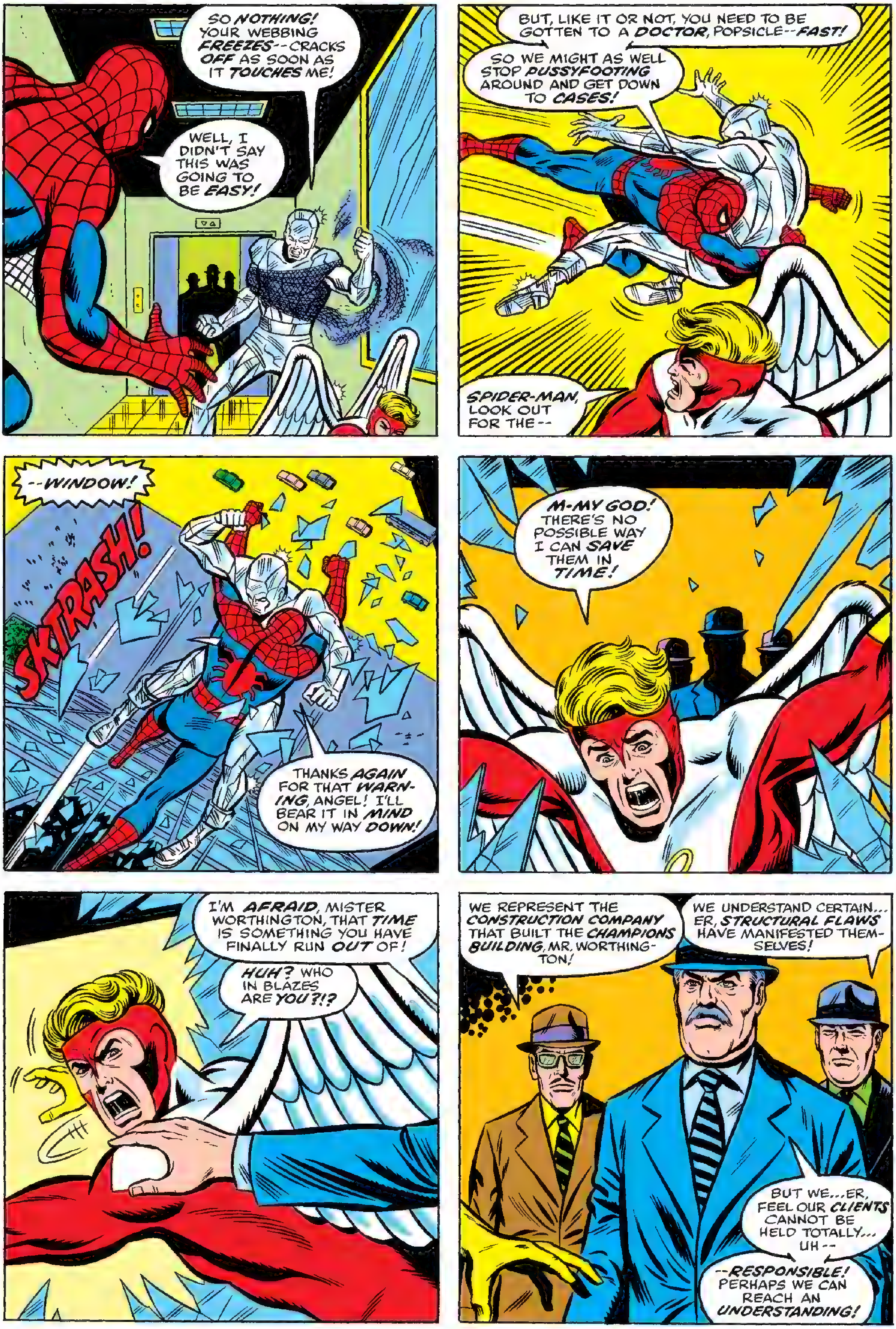

I HAVE AN IDEA WHAT THAT'S LIKE. I CAN'T HELP FEELING **SORRY** FOR--
ICEMAN... LEAN... **CLOSER!** MUST... **TELL**... YOU...
W-WHAT--?! YOU'RE MOVING... **SPEAKING! AWAKE**, AND--
AND THE MOMENT I HAVE **WAITED** FOR THROUGH ALL YOUR INTERMINABLE, MAUDLIN **VISITS** IS FINALLY AT HAND!
PWOOF!
CHOKE! **G-GAS!!**
YES--GAS MANUFACTURED **SECRETLY** FROM CHEMICALS STORED IN THE HOSPITAL DISPENSARY! YOUR **VISITS** INSPIRED A **PLAN** AS I LAY HEALING... AND **HATING**, DO-GOODER!
A PLAN OF... **REVENGE!**
THE GAS HAS AN **UNUSUAL** PROPERTY, ICEMAN! IT INDUCES A DEEP **HYPNOSIS!** YOU WILL DO WHAT I **SAY**, ICEMAN!
RISE, MUTANT-- AT MY **COMMAND!**
I... **RISE!**
VERY GOOD! THE HYPNOSIS EFFECT IS ONLY **TEMPORARY**--BUT IT WILL SERVE UNTIL I CAN EMPLOY A **STRONGER**, MORE **PERMANENT** MEANS OF CONTROL!
"TOTALLY **OBEDIENT**, BOBBY LIFTED THE **CRIPPLE** FROM THE BED, JUST AS...
YOU THERE! **STOP!** WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE **DOING?!?**
CLARKE... GOES... WITH... **ME!**
GOOD LORD! THE **ICEMAN** HAS **KIDNAPPED** A COMATOSE, **HELPLESS** MAN! BUT--**WHY?!**
HE ONCE **FOUGHT** CLARKE-- AND NOW HE WANTS **REVENGE!**
IT'S THE ONLY **ANSWER!**
"BY SAYING **NOTHING**, CLARKE **SMEARED** BOBBY'S NAME BUT **GOOD**, CAUSING HIM TO BE **FEARED** AS A VENGEANCE-LUSTING **VIGILANTE**... A **CRIMINAL!**"

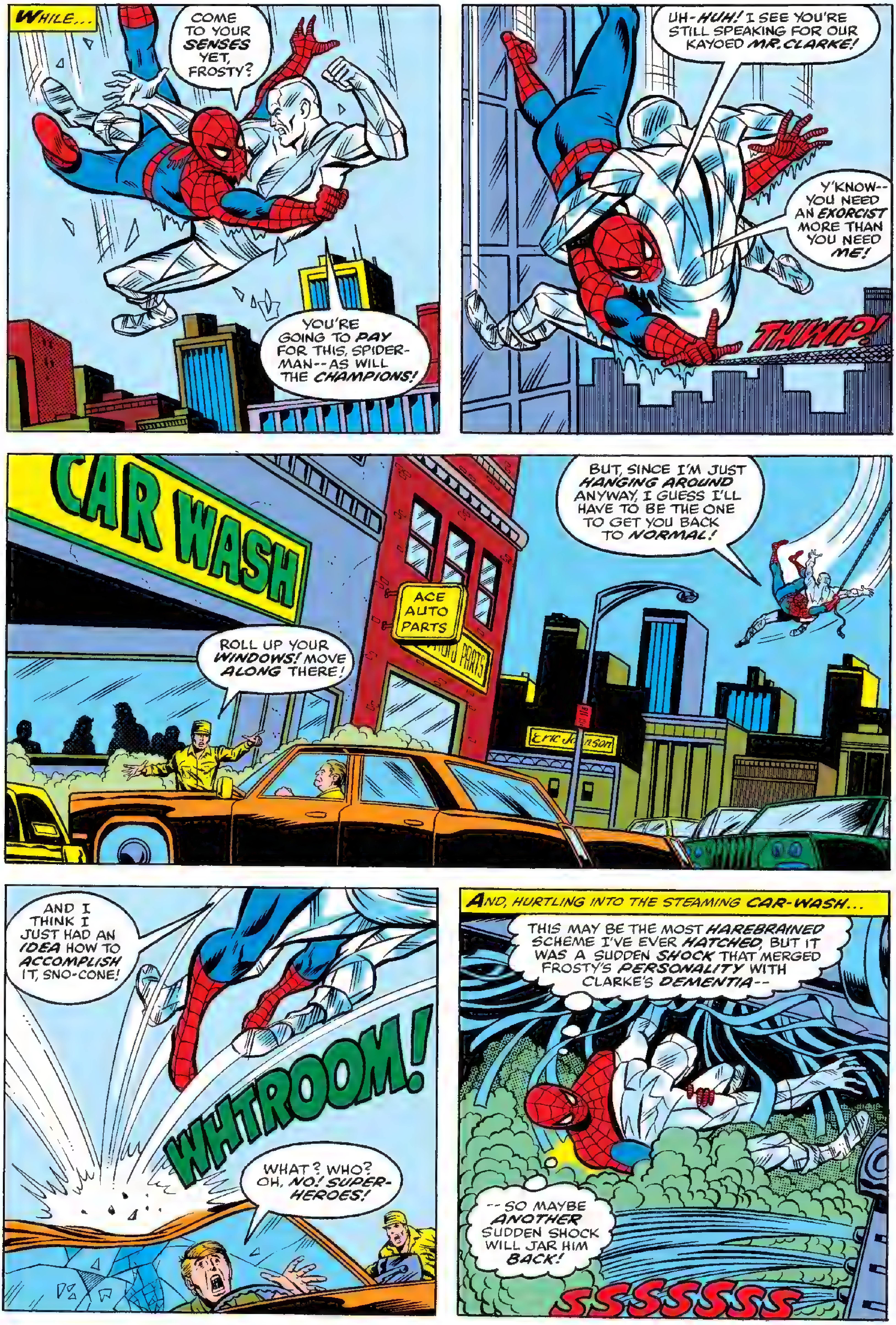

THE POLICE CALLED--AS MUCH AS ACCUSED ME OF COMPLICITY, THEN INSISTED THAT I BE MY BROTHER'S KEEPER AND FIND BOBBY!
BUT HE AND CLARKE FOUND YOU INSTEAD, HUH?
"YES! I SHOULD HAVE HAD THAT SPIDER-SENSE OF YOURS! THEN, WHEN I RETURNED TO OUR NOW-EMPTY HEADQUARTERS ATOP THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN--
"--THAT I WAS FLYING INTO A TRAP!"
GU-UKK!
RAMPAGE! BUT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN A COMA--A CRIPPLE!!
THE LATTER--THANKS TO THE CHAMPIONS--IS ALL TOO TRUE, ANGEL! AS TO MY COMATOSE STATE, I MUST SAY I FOOLED MY DOCTORS MOST INGENIOUSLY!
IS WEARING MY ARMOR? MY DEAR ANGEL, DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE--
CLARKE! THEN WHO--?!
--THE MINDLESS, HATE-FILLED COUNTENANCE OF YOUR FORMER TEAMMATE... THE ICEMAN?!
"BOBBY, IN THE RAMPAGE ARMOR, WAS THE KEY TO CLARKE'S REVENGE!
"I COULDN'T FIGHT HIM WITHOUT TAKING THE RISK OF HURTING HIM! CLARKE HAD US BOTH IN HIS POWER!"

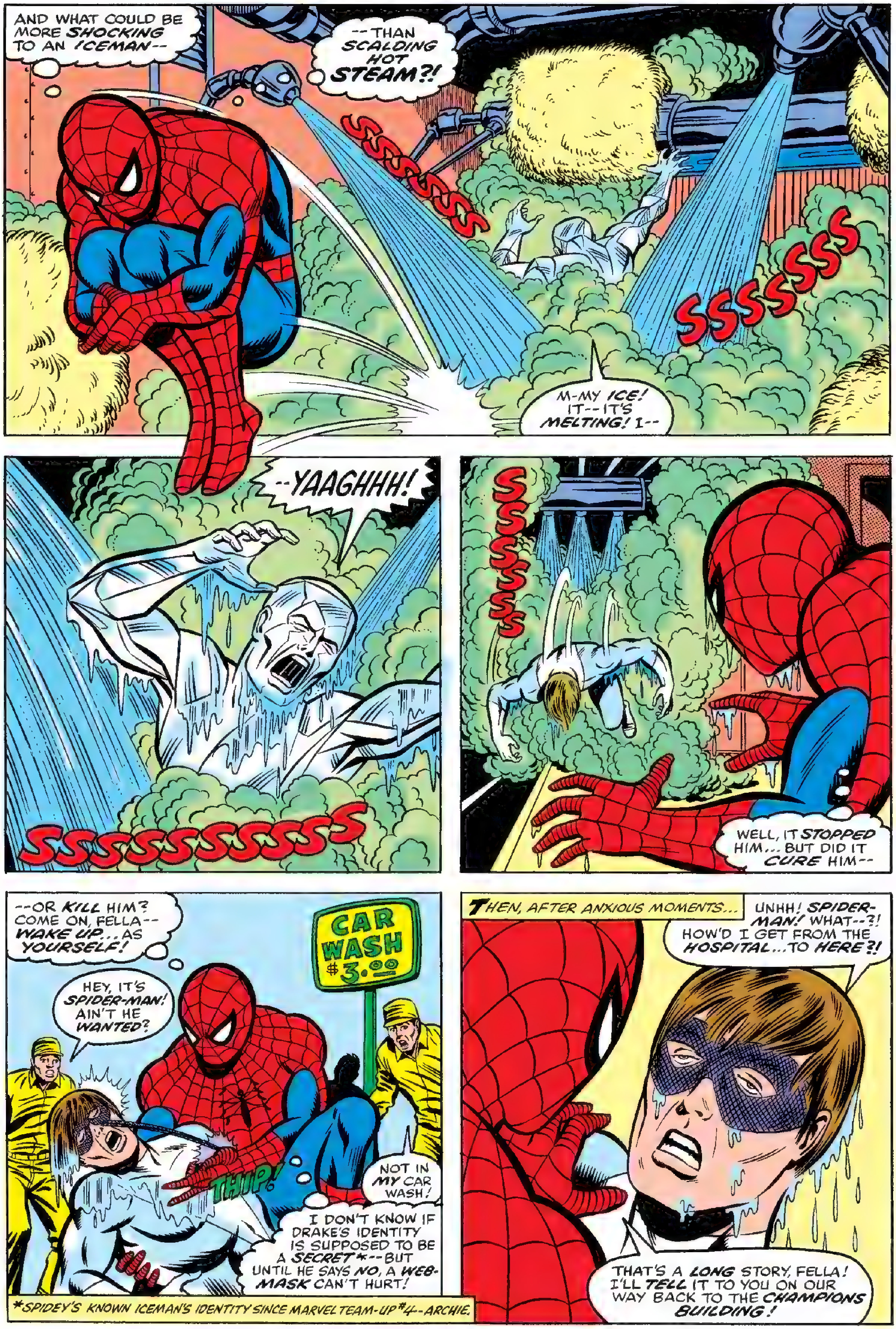

AND THAT'S WHERE *I* CAME IN, EH? SO, WINGS, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
KRASHTAM!
THE *SECURITY DOOR!* BOBBY'S *COLD* HAS RENDERED IT AS BRITTLE AS *GLASS!*
SO ALL IT TOOK TO GET *THROUGH* IT WAS A THUMP FROM AN *ICE-RAM?* SWELL!
NOW WE'RE RIGHT UP AGAINST A GUY WE *DON'T* WANT TO *FIGHT!*
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY *CHOICE,* WALL-CRAWLER--
--BECAUSE *I* WANT YOU *DEAD!!*
SPIDER-MAN-- *LOOK OUT!*
Y'KNOW, WINGS, I DON'T THINK A *WARNING* IS WHAT I *NEED* JUST NOW!
IT'S AS IF CLARKE'S *MURDEROUS* INTENTIONS HAVE *FUSED* ONTO BOBBY'S *MIND* LIKE A *POST-HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION*--
--WITHOUT AFFECTING HIS *FIGHTING* ABILITY OR HIS *MANNERISMS!*
HE STILL *SOUNDS* LIKE MY BEST FRIEND-- BUT HE'S *OUT* TO TAKE MY *LIFE!*
GOT YOU, DADDY WARBUCKS!

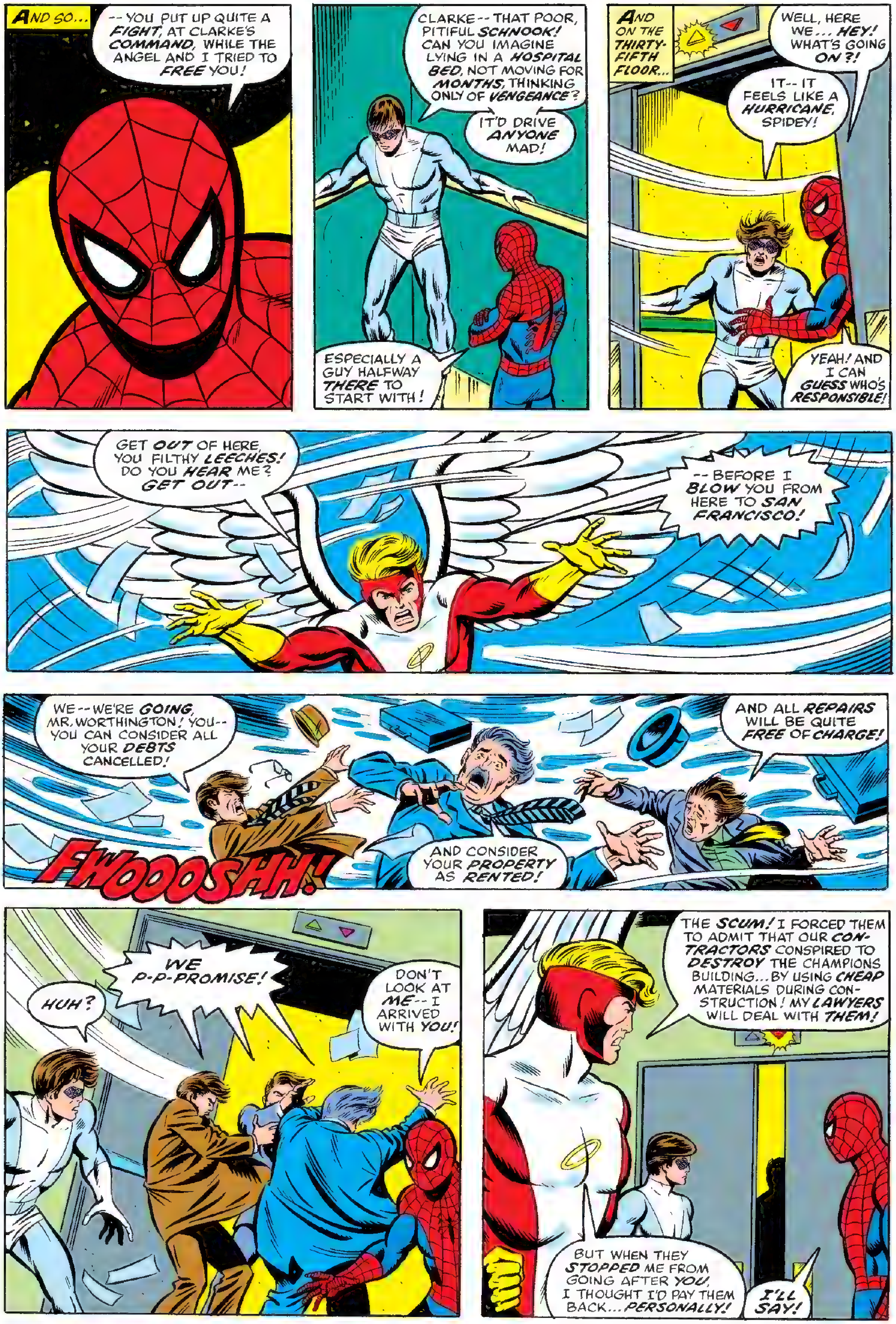
FLAP AWAY, ANGEL! MAYBE IF YOU FLAP HARD ENOUGH--
--YOU'LL MAKE IT TO HEAVEN!
AND, AS ICY FINGERS AT HIS THROAT BEGIN TO LOWER THE ANGEL'S BODY TEMPERATURE--
--OUR SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN IS HAVING TROUBLES OF HIS OWN!
THE BLASTED ICE-BALL KEEPS ROLLING AFTER ME DOWN THE CORRIDOR!
BUT I'VE FINALLY MANAGED TO HUG THE CEILING--TO LEAP BEHIND IT!
I'M SAFE--
"--BUT IT'S ROLLING RIGHT OUT THE BLASTED WINDOW!!"
SKRASH!
THEY'RE AT IT AGAIN! FIRST IT WAS FALLING WINDOWS,* NOW IT'S SPIKED ICE CUBES!
GOOD LORD, WE--WE'LL BE KILLED!
*LAST ISH--ARCH.
BUT THEN...
THIP!
THAP!
WE'RE... SAVED? BY WEBBING?!

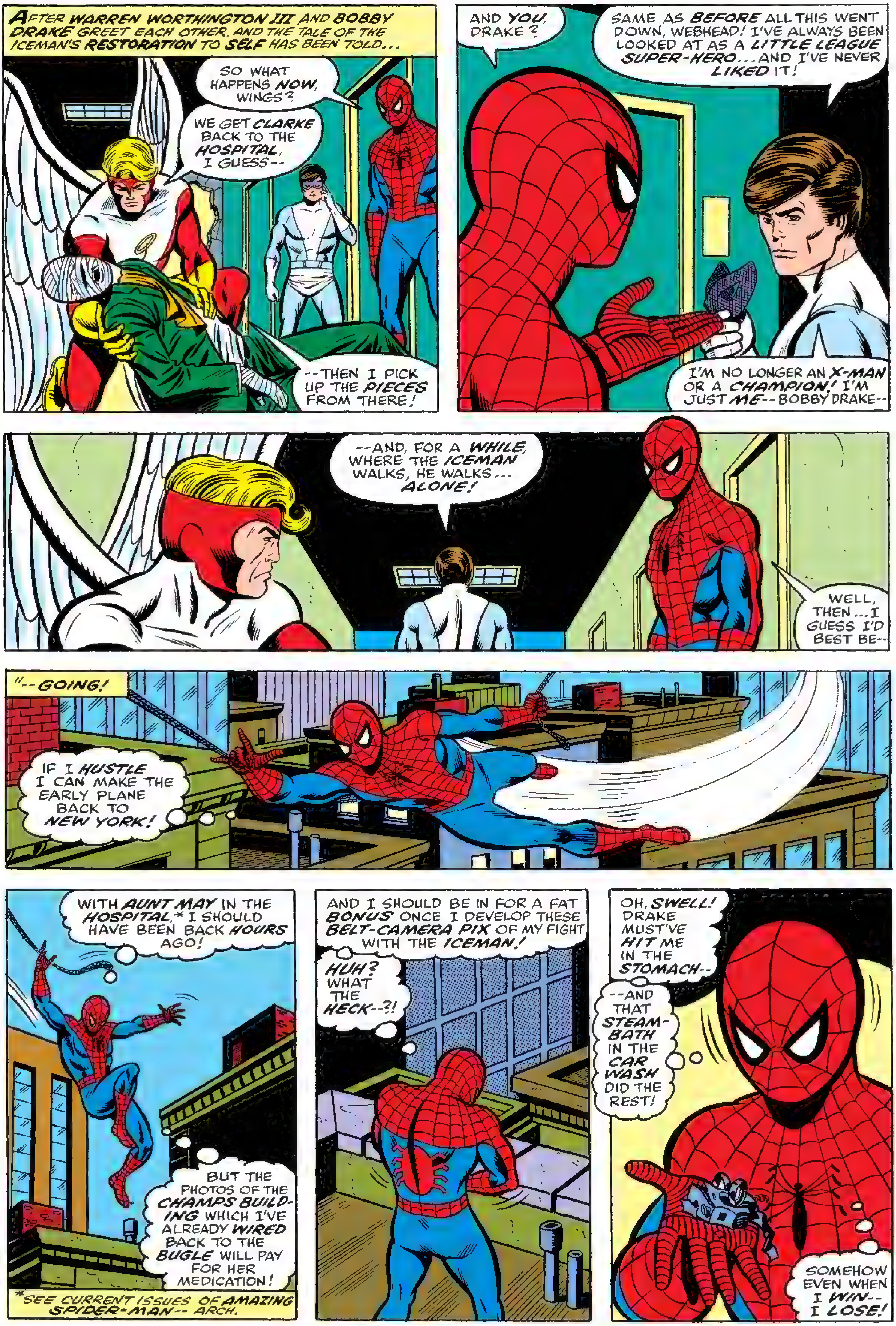

IN A WORD... YES!
B-BUT... I CAUGHT IT BEFORE IT KILLED ANYONE!
AND, ON THE PLAZA BELOW...
IT--IT'S JUST HANGING THERE... MELTING!
DO--DO YOU THINK IT MIGHT BE SOME NEW FORM OF... ART?
NOTHING IN LOS ANGELES WOULD SURPRISE ME!
MEANWHILE, IN THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING...
DRAKE-- YOU'RE KILLING HIM!
THAT'S THE IDEA, ISN'T IT?
WTHAM!
IT MAY HAVE BEEN CLARKE'S IDEA, FROSTY-- BUT IT'S NOT YOURS! STILL, IF YOU'RE TOO WIGGED-OUT TO REALIZE THAT--!
SORRY, PAL-- BUT YOU KNOW NOT WHAT YOU DO!
NOW, YOU WALKING SNO-CONE-- WILL YOU AT LEAST TRY TO REMEMBER?
ALL I REMEMBER IS THAT YOU'RE MY ENEMY! I HATE YOU... AND I'M GOING TO KILL YOU.
BLAST IT-- THE HATE YOU FEEL BELONGS TO CLARKE-- TO RAMPAGE--NOT TO YOU! YOU'RE BOBBY DRAKE... THE ICEMAN!
AND YOU'RE TRYING TO DESTROY ME!
THIP!
BROTHER! I CAN SEE REASONING WITH YOU IS A WASTE, SO...

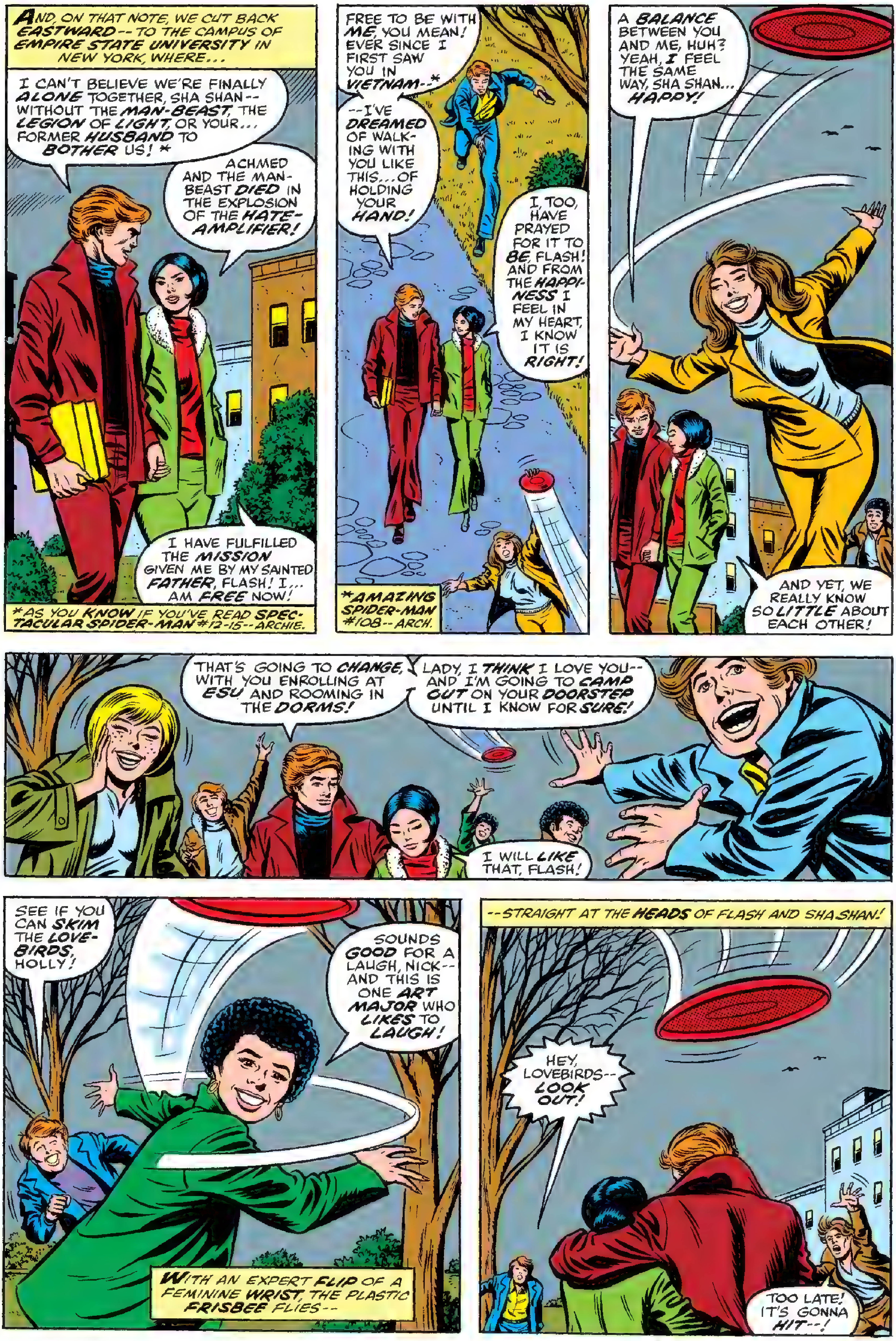

SO NOTHING! YOUR WEBBING FREEZES--CRACKS OFF AS SOON AS IT TOUCHES ME!
WELL, I DIDN'T SAY THIS WAS GOING TO BE EASY!
BUT, LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU NEED TO BE GOTTEN TO A DOCTOR, POPSICLE--FAST!
SO WE MIGHT AS WELL STOP PUSSYFOOTING AROUND AND GET DOWN TO CASES!
SPIDER-MAN, LOOK OUT FOR THE--
--WINDOW!
SKTRASH!
THANKS AGAIN FOR THAT WARNING, ANGEL! I'LL BEAR IT IN MIND ON MY WAY DOWN!
M-MY GOD! THERE'S NO POSSIBLE WAY I CAN SAVE THEM IN TIME!
I'M AFRAID, MISTER WORTHINGTON, THAT TIME IS SOMETHING YOU HAVE FINALLY RUN OUT OF!
HUH? WHO IN BLAZES ARE YOU?!?
WE REPRESENT THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY THAT BUILT THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING, MR. WORTHINGTON!
WE UNDERSTAND CERTAIN... ER, STRUCTURAL FLAWS HAVE MANIFESTED THEMSELVES!
BUT WE...ER, FEEL OUR CLIENTS CANNOT BE HELD TOTALLY... UH--
--RESPONSIBLE! PERHAPS WE CAN REACH AN UNDERSTANDING!

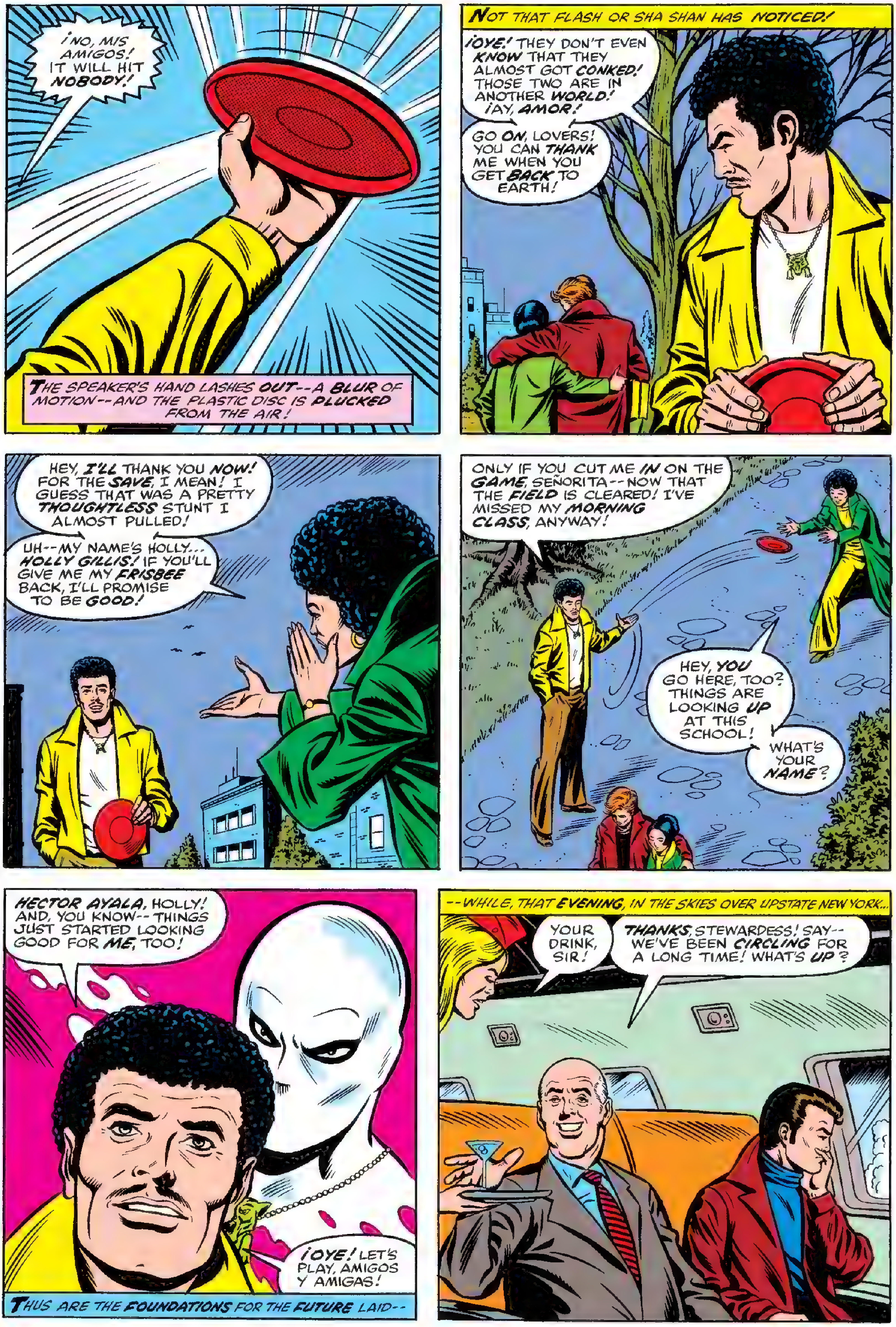

WHILE...
COME TO YOUR SENSES YET, FROSTY?
YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THIS, SPIDER-MAN--AS WILL THE CHAMPIONS!
UH-HUH! I SEE YOU'RE STILL SPEAKING FOR OUR KAYOED MR. CLARKE!
Y'KNOW--YOU NEED AN EXORCIST MORE THAN YOU NEED ME!
THWIP!
CAR WASH
BUT, SINCE I'M JUST HANGING AROUND ANYWAY, I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO GET YOU BACK TO NORMAL!
ACE AUTO PARTS
ROLL UP YOUR WINDOWS! MOVE ALONG THERE!
AND I THINK I JUST HAD AN IDEA HOW TO ACCOMPLISH IT, SNO-CONE!
WHTROOM!
WHAT? WHO? OH, NO! SUPER-HEROES!
AND, HURTLING INTO THE STEAMING CAR-WASH...
THIS MAY BE THE MOST HAREBRAINED SCHEME I'VE EVER HATCHED, BUT IT WAS A SUDDEN SHOCK THAT MERGED FROSTY'S PERSONALITY WITH CLARKE'S DEMENTIA--
--SO MAYBE ANOTHER SUDDEN SHOCK WILL JAR HIM BACK!
SSSSSSS

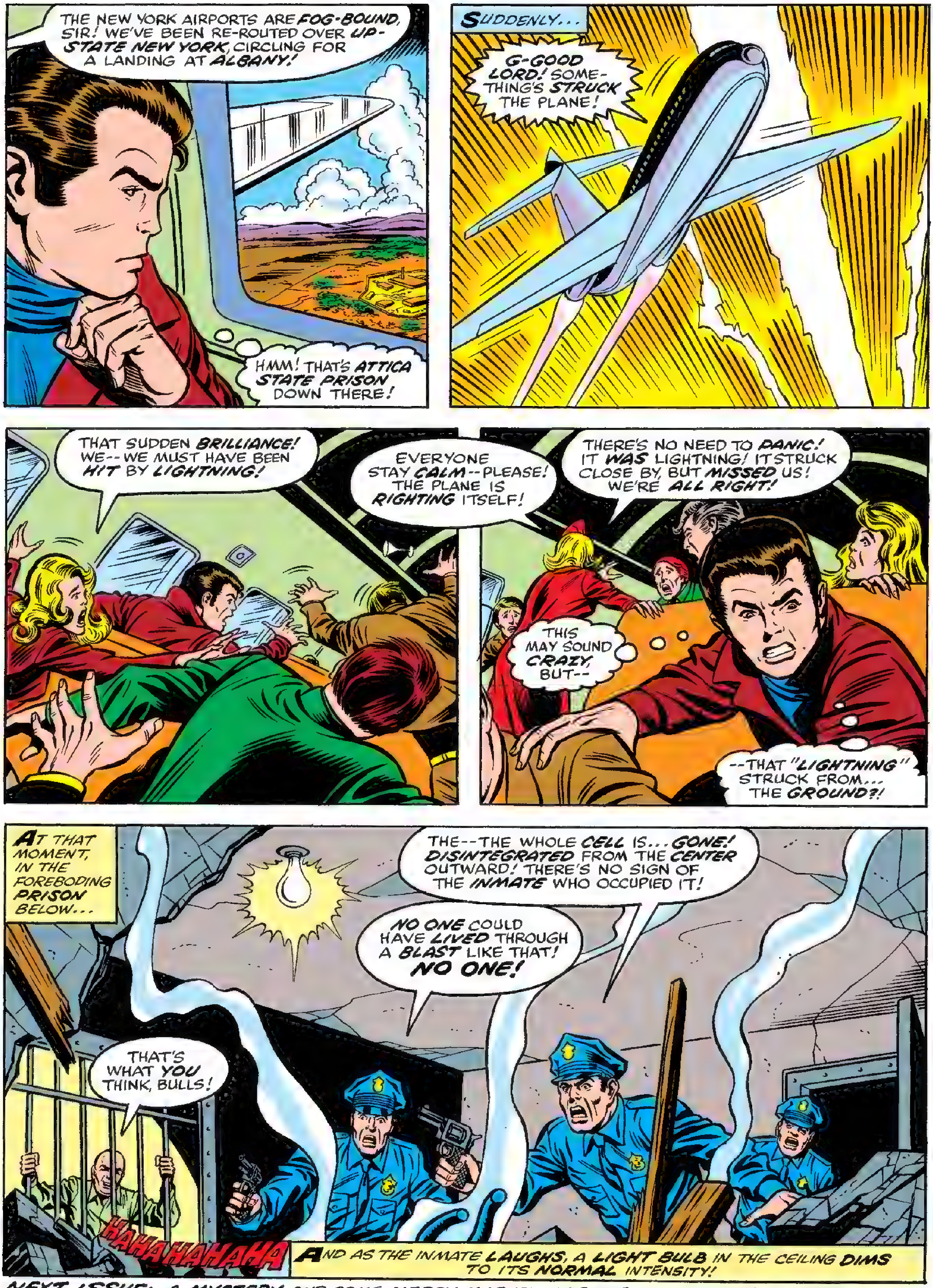

AND WHAT COULD BE MORE SHOCKING TO AN ICEMAN--
--THAN SCALDING HOT STEAM?!
SSSSSSS
SSSSSSS
M-MY ICE! IT--IT'S MELTING! I--
--YAAGHHH!
SSSSSSSSSS
SSSSSSS
WELL, IT STOPPED HIM... BUT DID IT CURE HIM--
--OR KILL HIM? COME ON, FELLA-- WAKE UP... AS YOURSELF!
CAR WASH $3.00
HEY, IT'S SPIDER-MAN! AIN'T HE WANTED?
THIP!
NOT IN MY CAR WASH!
I DON'T KNOW IF DRAKE'S IDENTITY IS SUPPOSED TO BE A SECRET*--BUT UNTIL HE SAYS NO, A WEB-MASK CAN'T HURT!
*SPIDEY'S KNOWN ICEMAN'S IDENTITY SINCE MARVEL TEAM-UP #4--ARCHIE.
THEN, AFTER ANXIOUS MOMENTS...
UNHH! SPIDER-MAN! WHAT--?! HOW'D I GET FROM THE HOSPITAL...TO HERE?!
THAT'S A LONG STORY, FELLA! I'LL TELL IT TO YOU ON OUR WAY BACK TO THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING!


AND SO...
--YOU PUT UP QUITE A FIGHT, AT CLARKE'S COMMAND, WHILE THE ANGEL AND I TRIED TO FREE YOU!
CLARKE--THAT POOR, PITIFUL SCHNOOK! CAN YOU IMAGINE LYING IN A HOSPITAL BED, NOT MOVING FOR MONTHS, THINKING ONLY OF VENGEANCE?
IT'D DRIVE ANYONE MAD!
ESPECIALLY A GUY HALFWAY THERE TO START WITH!
AND ON THE THIRTY-FIFTH FLOOR...
WELL, HERE WE... HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON?!
IT--IT FEELS LIKE A HURRICANE, SPIDEY!
YEAH! AND I CAN GUESS WHO'S RESPONSIBLE!
GET OUT OF HERE, YOU FILTHY LEECHES! DO YOU HEAR ME? GET OUT--
--BEFORE I BLOW YOU FROM HERE TO SAN FRANCISCO!
WE--WE'RE GOING, MR. WORTHINGTON! YOU--YOU CAN CONSIDER ALL YOUR DEBTS CANCELLED!
FWOOOSHH!
AND CONSIDER YOUR PROPERTY AS RENTED!
AND ALL REPAIRS WILL BE QUITE FREE OF CHARGE!
HUH?
WE P-P-PROMISE!
DON'T LOOK AT ME--I ARRIVED WITH YOU!
THE SCUM! I FORCED THEM TO ADMIT THAT OUR CONTRACTORS CONSPIRED TO DESTROY THE CHAMPIONS BUILDING... BY USING CHEAP MATERIALS DURING CONSTRUCTION! MY LAWYERS WILL DEAL WITH THEM!
BUT WHEN THEY STOPPED ME FROM GOING AFTER YOU, I THOUGHT I'D PAY THEM BACK... PERSONALLY!
I'LL SAY!


AFTER WARREN WORTHINGTON III AND BOBBY DRAKE GREET EACH OTHER, AND THE TALE OF THE ICEMAN'S RESTORATION TO SELF HAS BEEN TOLD...
SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW, WINGS?
WE GET CLARKE BACK TO THE HOSPITAL, I GUESS--
--THEN I PICK UP THE PIECES FROM THERE!
AND YOU, DRAKE?
SAME AS BEFORE ALL THIS WENT DOWN, WEBHEAD! I'VE ALWAYS BEEN LOOKED AT AS A LITTLE LEAGUE SUPER-HERO... AND I'VE NEVER LIKED IT!
I'M NO LONGER AN X-MAN OR A CHAMPION! I'M JUST ME-- BOBBY DRAKE--
--AND, FOR A WHILE, WHERE THE ICEMAN WALKS, HE WALKS... ALONE!
WELL, THEN... I GUESS I'D BEST BE--
"--GOING!
IF I HUSTLE I CAN MAKE THE EARLY PLANE BACK TO NEW YORK!
WITH AUNT MAY IN THE HOSPITAL,* I SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK HOURS AGO!
BUT THE PHOTOS OF THE CHAMPS BUILDING WHICH I'VE ALREADY WIRED BACK TO THE BUGLE WILL PAY FOR HER MEDICATION!
*SEE CURRENT ISSUES OF AMAZING SPIDER-MAN-- ARCH.
AND I SHOULD BE IN FOR A FAT BONUS ONCE I DEVELOP THESE BELT-CAMERA PIX OF MY FIGHT WITH THE ICEMAN!
HUH? WHAT THE HECK--?!
OH, SWELL! DRAKE MUST'VE HIT ME IN THE STOMACH--
--AND THAT STEAM-BATH IN THE CAR WASH DID THE REST!
SOMEHOW EVEN WHEN I WIN-- I LOSE!


AND, ON THAT NOTE, WE CUT BACK EASTWARD -- TO THE CAMPUS OF EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK, WHERE...
I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE FINALLY ALONE TOGETHER, SHA SHAN -- WITHOUT THE MAN-BEAST, THE LEGION OF LIGHT, OR YOUR... FORMER HUSBAND TO BOTHER US! *
ACHMED AND THE MAN-BEAST DIED IN THE EXPLOSION OF THE HATE-AMPLIFIER!
I HAVE FULFILLED THE MISSION GIVEN ME BY MY SAINTED FATHER, FLASH! I... AM FREE NOW!
*AS YOU KNOW IF YOU'VE READ SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #12-15 -- ARCHIE.
FREE TO BE WITH ME, YOU MEAN! EVER SINCE I FIRST SAW YOU IN VIETNAM --*
--I'VE DREAMED OF WALKING WITH YOU LIKE THIS... OF HOLDING YOUR HAND!
I, TOO, HAVE PRAYED FOR IT TO BE, FLASH! AND FROM THE HAPPINESS I FEEL IN MY HEART, I KNOW IT IS RIGHT!
*AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #108 -- ARCH.
A BALANCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME, HUH? YEAH, I FEEL THE SAME WAY, SHA SHAN... HAPPY!
AND YET, WE REALLY KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT EACH OTHER!
THAT'S GOING TO CHANGE, WITH YOU ENROLLING AT ESU AND ROOMING IN THE DORMS!
LADY, I THINK I LOVE YOU -- AND I'M GOING TO CAMP OUT ON YOUR DOORSTEP UNTIL I KNOW FOR SURE!
I WILL LIKE THAT, FLASH!
SEE IF YOU CAN SKIM THE LOVEBIRDS, HOLLY!
SOUNDS GOOD FOR A LAUGH, NICK -- AND THIS IS ONE ART MAJOR WHO LIKES TO LAUGH!
WITH AN EXPERT FLIP OF A FEMININE WRIST, THE PLASTIC FRISBEE FLIES --
--STRAIGHT AT THE HEADS OF FLASH AND SHA SHAN!
HEY, LOVEBIRDS -- LOOK OUT!
TOO LATE! IT'S GONNA HIT--!


¡NO, MIS AMIGOS! IT WILL HIT NOBODY!
THE SPEAKER'S HAND LASHES OUT--A BLUR OF MOTION--AND THE PLASTIC DISC IS PLUCKED FROM THE AIR!
NOT THAT FLASH OR SHA SHAN HAS NOTICED!
¡OYE! THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT THEY ALMOST GOT CONKED! THOSE TWO ARE IN ANOTHER WORLD! ¡AY, AMOR!
GO ON, LOVERS! YOU CAN THANK ME WHEN YOU GET BACK TO EARTH!
HEY, I'LL THANK YOU NOW! FOR THE SAVE, I MEAN! I GUESS THAT WAS A PRETTY THOUGHTLESS STUNT I ALMOST PULLED!
UH--MY NAME'S HOLLY... HOLLY GILLIS! IF YOU'LL GIVE ME MY FRISBEE BACK, I'LL PROMISE TO BE GOOD!
ONLY IF YOU CUT ME IN ON THE GAME, SEÑORITA--NOW THAT THE FIELD IS CLEARED! I'VE MISSED MY MORNING CLASS, ANYWAY!
HEY, YOU GO HERE, TOO? THINGS ARE LOOKING UP AT THIS SCHOOL!
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
HECTOR AYALA, HOLLY! AND, YOU KNOW--THINGS JUST STARTED LOOKING GOOD FOR ME, TOO!
¡OYE! LET'S PLAY, AMIGOS Y AMIGAS!
THUS ARE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE LAID--
--WHILE, THAT EVENING, IN THE SKIES OVER UPSTATE NEW YORK...
YOUR DRINK, SIR!
THANKS, STEWARDESS! SAY--WE'VE BEEN CIRCLING FOR A LONG TIME! WHAT'S UP?


THE NEW YORK AIRPORTS ARE FOG-BOUND, SIR! WE'VE BEEN RE-ROUTED OVER UP-STATE NEW YORK, CIRCLING FOR A LANDING AT ALBANY!
HMM! THAT'S ATTICA STATE PRISON DOWN THERE!
SUDDENLY...
G-GOOD LORD! SOMETHING'S STRUCK THE PLANE!
THAT SUDDEN BRILLIANCE! WE--WE MUST HAVE BEEN HIT BY LIGHTNING!
EVERYONE STAY CALM--PLEASE! THE PLANE IS RIGHTING ITSELF!
THERE'S NO NEED TO PANIC! IT WAS LIGHTNING! IT STRUCK CLOSE BY, BUT MISSED US! WE'RE ALL RIGHT!
THIS MAY SOUND CRAZY, BUT--
--THAT "LIGHTNING" STRUCK FROM... THE GROUND?!
AT THAT MOMENT, IN THE FOREBODING PRISON BELOW...
THE--THE WHOLE CELL IS... GONE! DISINTEGRATED FROM THE CENTER OUTWARD! THERE'S NO SIGN OF THE INMATE WHO OCCUPIED IT!
NO ONE COULD HAVE LIVED THROUGH A BLAST LIKE THAT! NO ONE!
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, BULLS!
HAHAHAHAHA
AND AS THE INMATE LAUGHS, A LIGHT BULB IN THE CEILING DIMS TO ITS NORMAL INTENSITY!

NEXT ISSUE: A MYSTERY AND SOME MERRY MARVEL NASTIES YOU'LL LOVE TO HATE!

ANYONE REMEMBER... The ENFORCERS?

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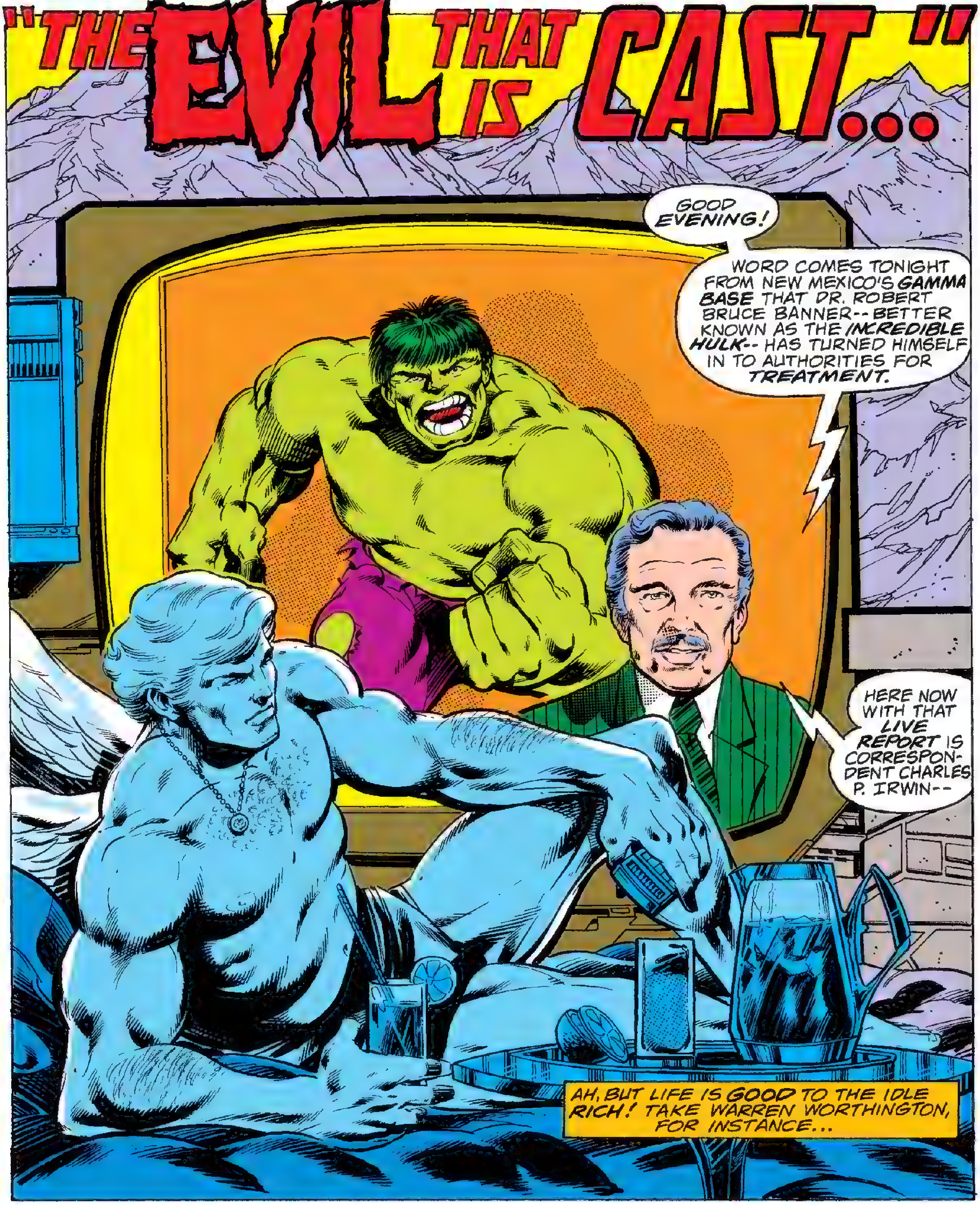
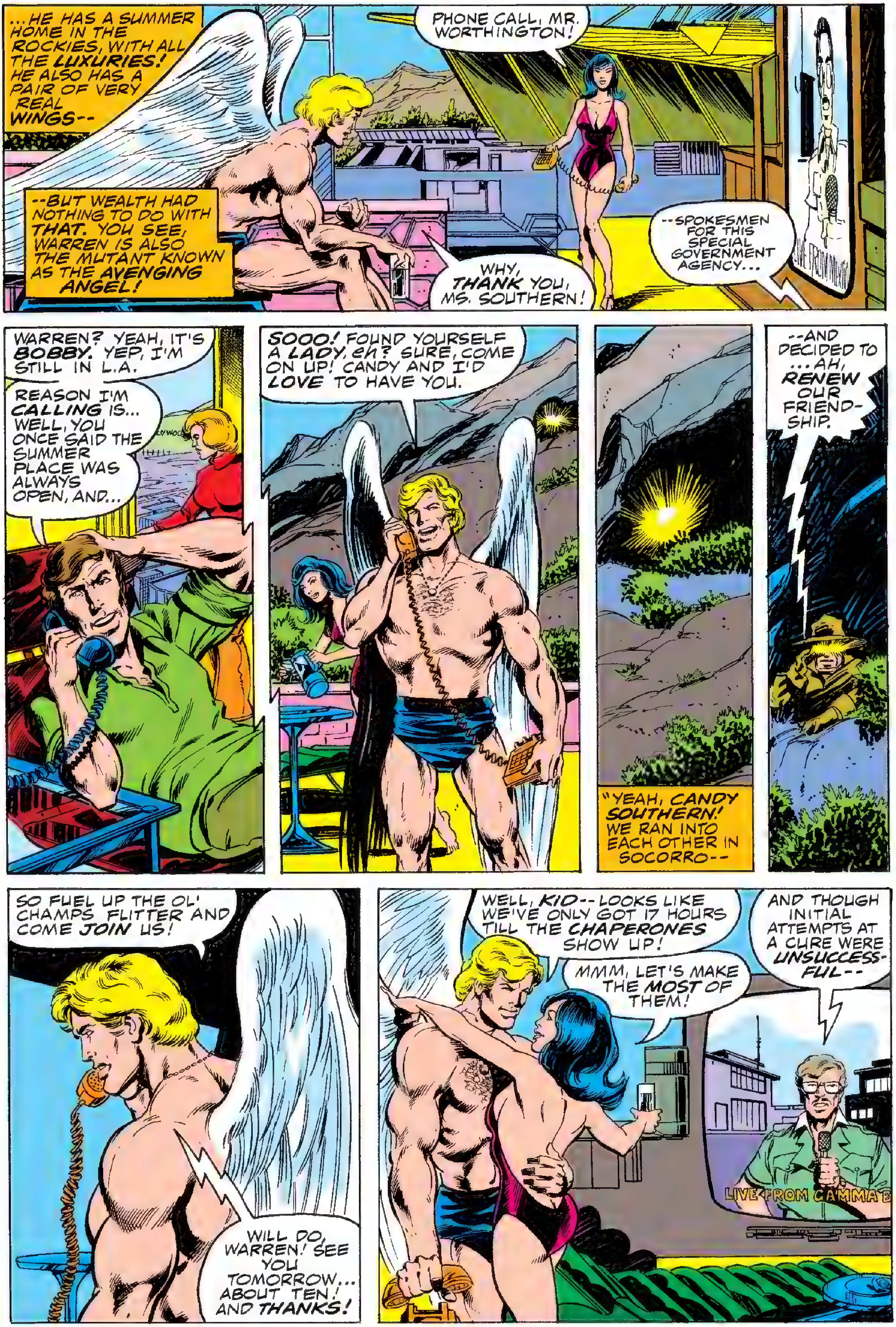
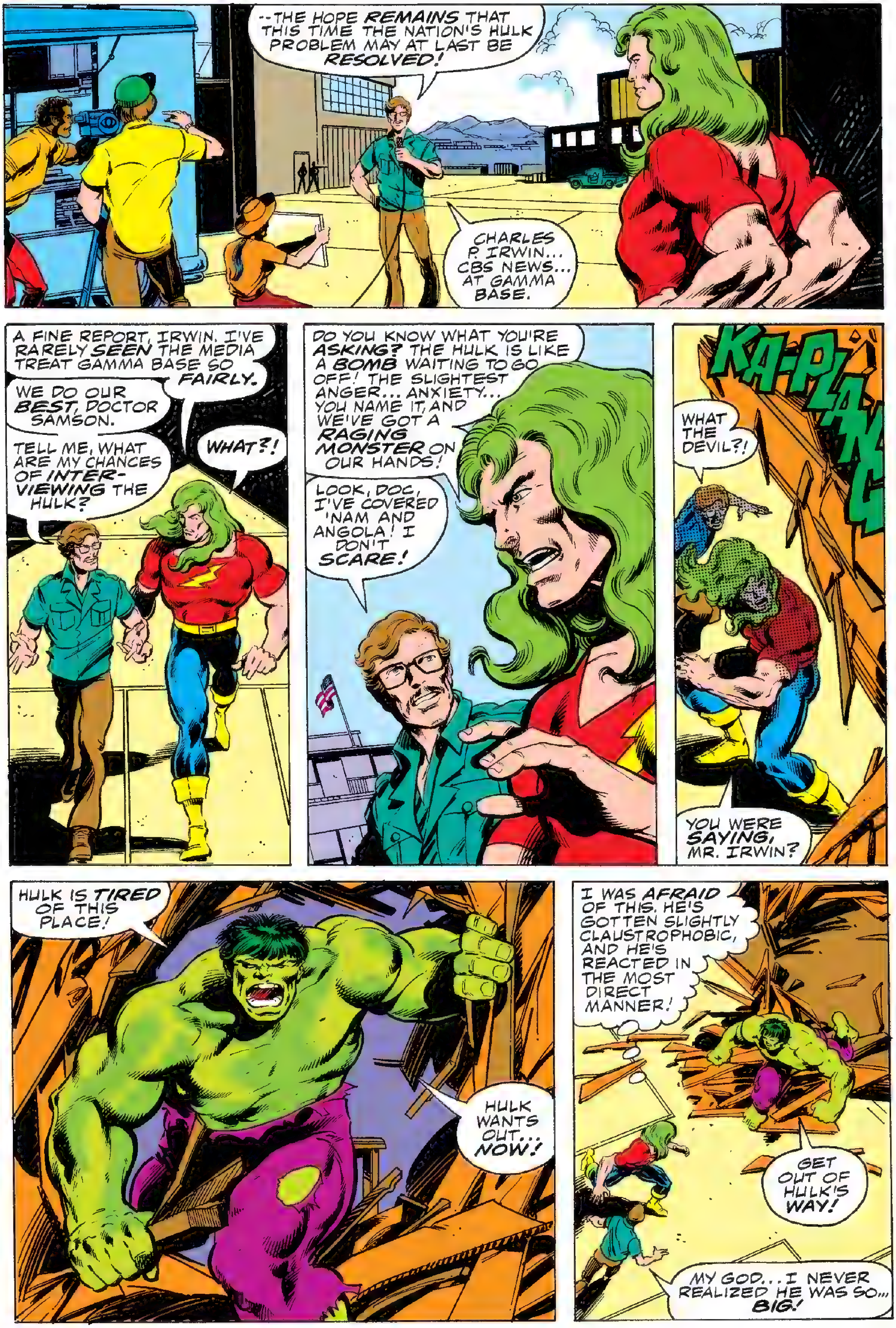
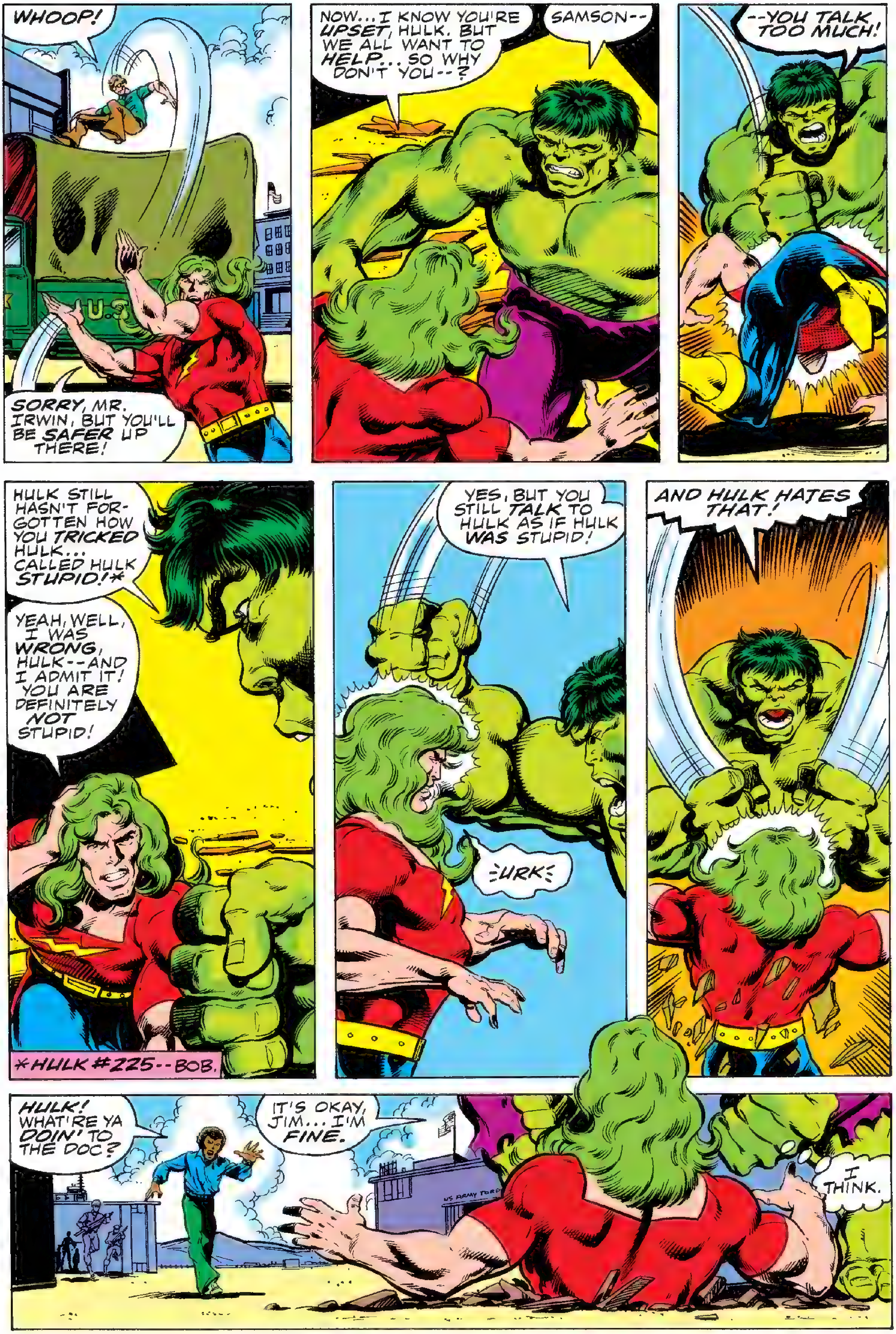
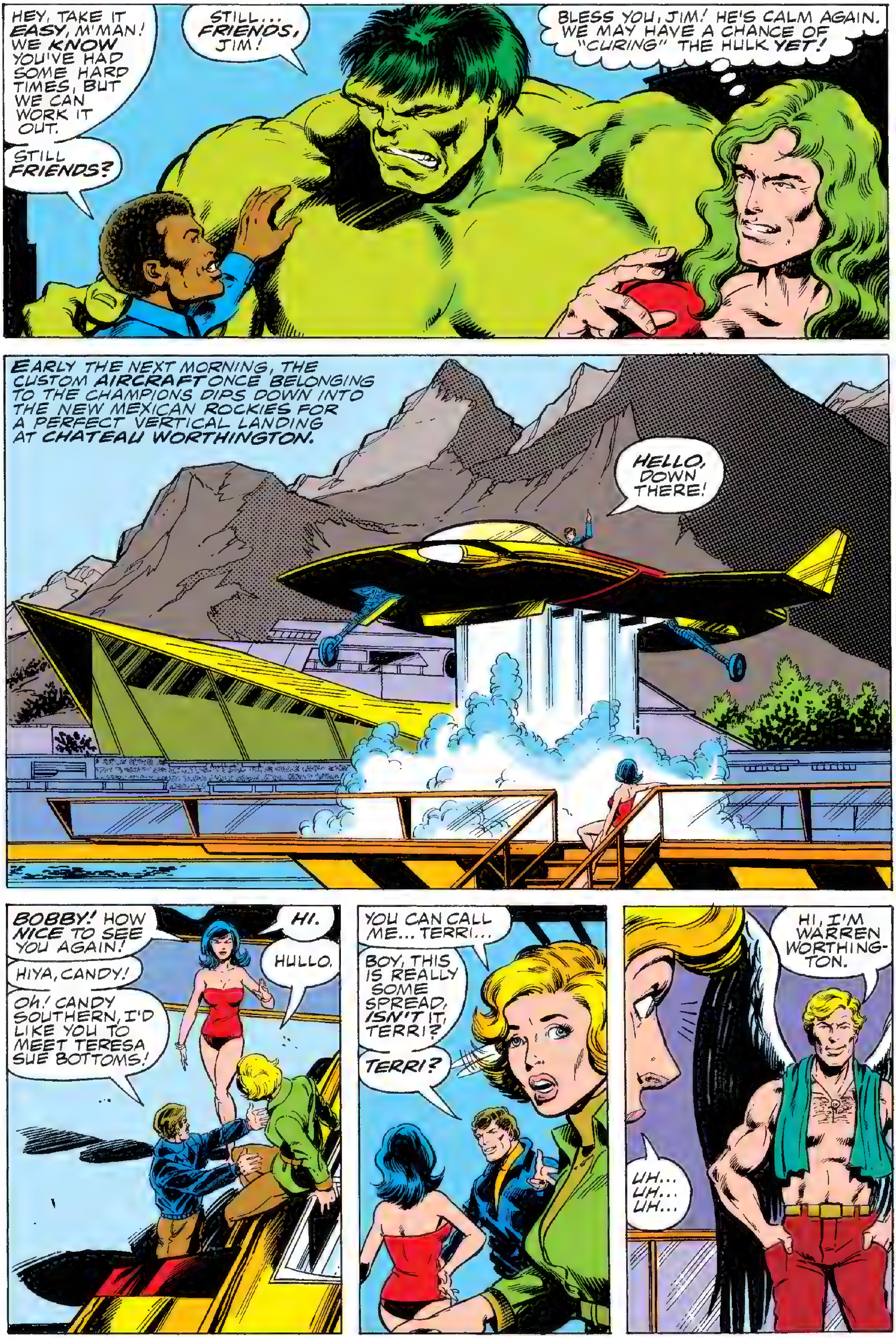
"THE EVIL THAT IS CAST..."

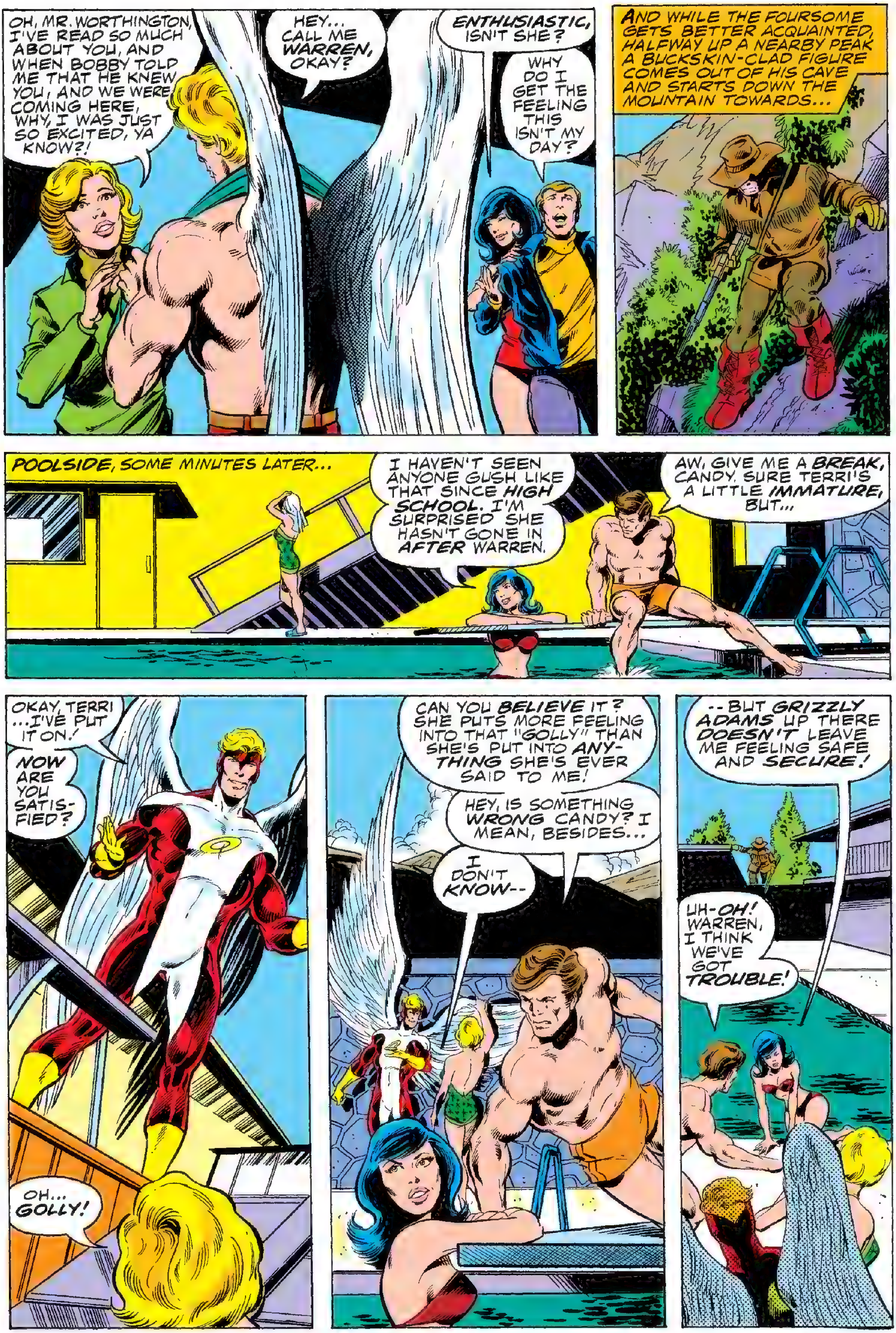

GOOD EVENING!
WORD COMES TONIGHT FROM NEW MEXICO'S **GAMMA BASE** THAT DR. ROBERT BRUCE BANNER--BETTER KNOWN AS THE *INCREDIBLE HULK*--HAS TURNED HIMSELF IN TO AUTHORITIES FOR *TREATMENT.*
HERE NOW WITH THAT *LIVE REPORT* IS CORRESPONDENT CHARLES P. IRWIN--
AH, BUT LIFE IS **GOOD** TO THE IDLE *RICH!* TAKE WARREN WORTHINGTON, FOR INSTANCE...

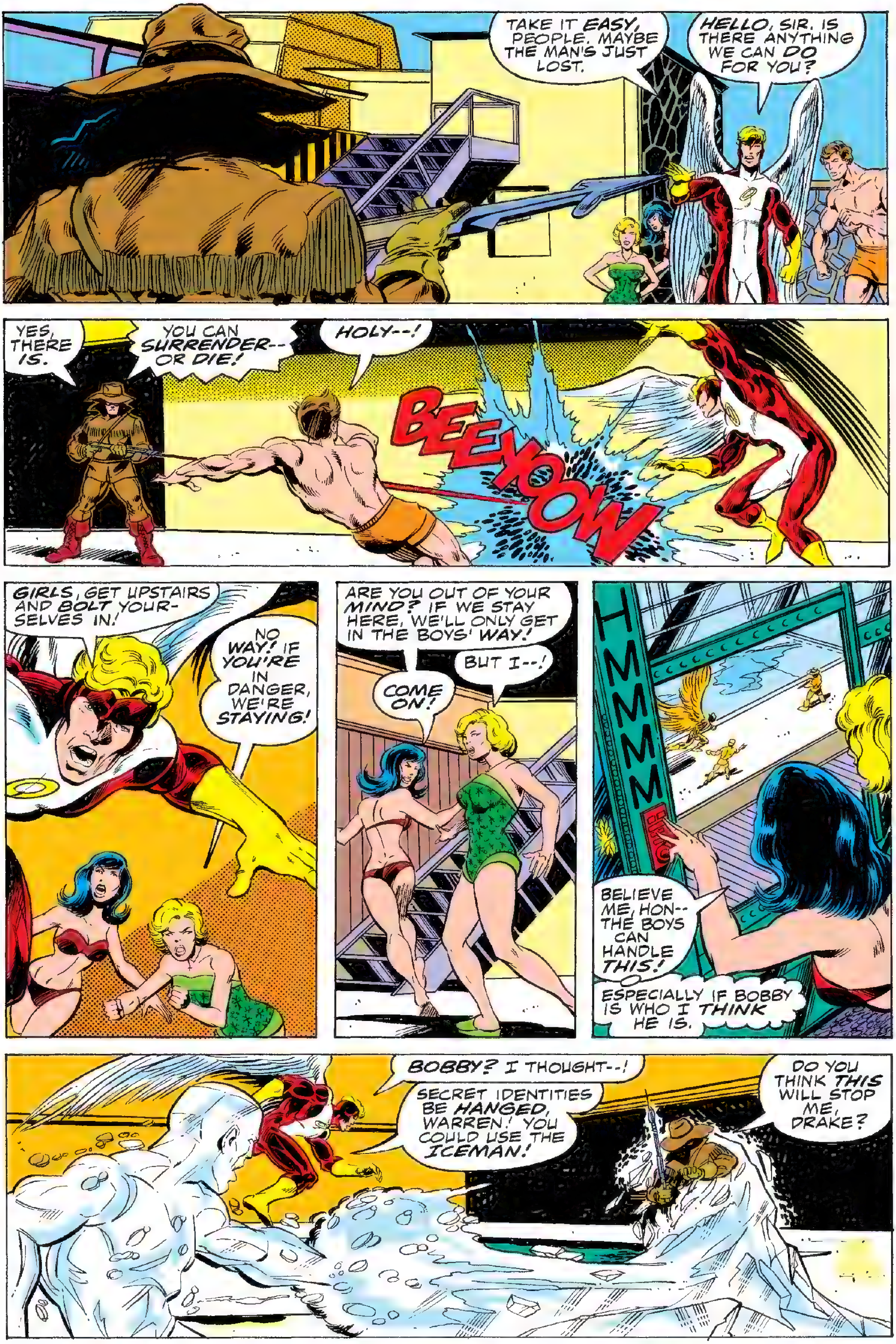

...HE HAS A SUMMER HOME IN THE ROCKIES, WITH ALL THE **LUXURIES!** HE ALSO HAS A PAIR OF VERY REAL **WINGS**--
PHONE CALL, MR. WORTHINGTON!
--BUT WEALTH HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH **THAT**. YOU SEE, WARREN IS ALSO THE MUTANT KNOWN AS THE **AVENGING ANGEL!**
WHY, **THANK** YOU, MS. SOUTHERN!
--SPOKESMEN FOR THIS SPECIAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY...
WARREN? YEAH, IT'S **BOBBY**. YEP, I'M STILL IN L.A.
REASON I'M **CALLING** IS... WELL, YOU ONCE SAID THE SUMMER PLACE WAS ALWAYS OPEN, AND...
SOOO! FOUND YOURSELF A **LADY**, *eh?* SURE, COME ON UP! CANDY AND I'D **LOVE** TO HAVE YOU.
"YEAH, **CANDY SOUTHERN!** WE RAN INTO EACH OTHER IN SOCORRO--
--AND DECIDED TO ...AH, **RENEW** OUR FRIENDSHIP.
SO FUEL UP THE OL' CHAMPS FLITTER AND COME **JOIN** US!
WILL DO, WARREN! SEE YOU TOMORROW... ABOUT TEN! AND **THANKS!**
WELL, **KID**-- LOOKS LIKE WE'VE ONLY GOT 17 HOURS TILL THE **CHAPERONES** SHOW UP!
MMM, LET'S MAKE THE **MOST** OF THEM!
AND THOUGH INITIAL ATTEMPTS AT A CURE WERE **UNSUCCESSFUL**--
LIVE FROM GAMMA B

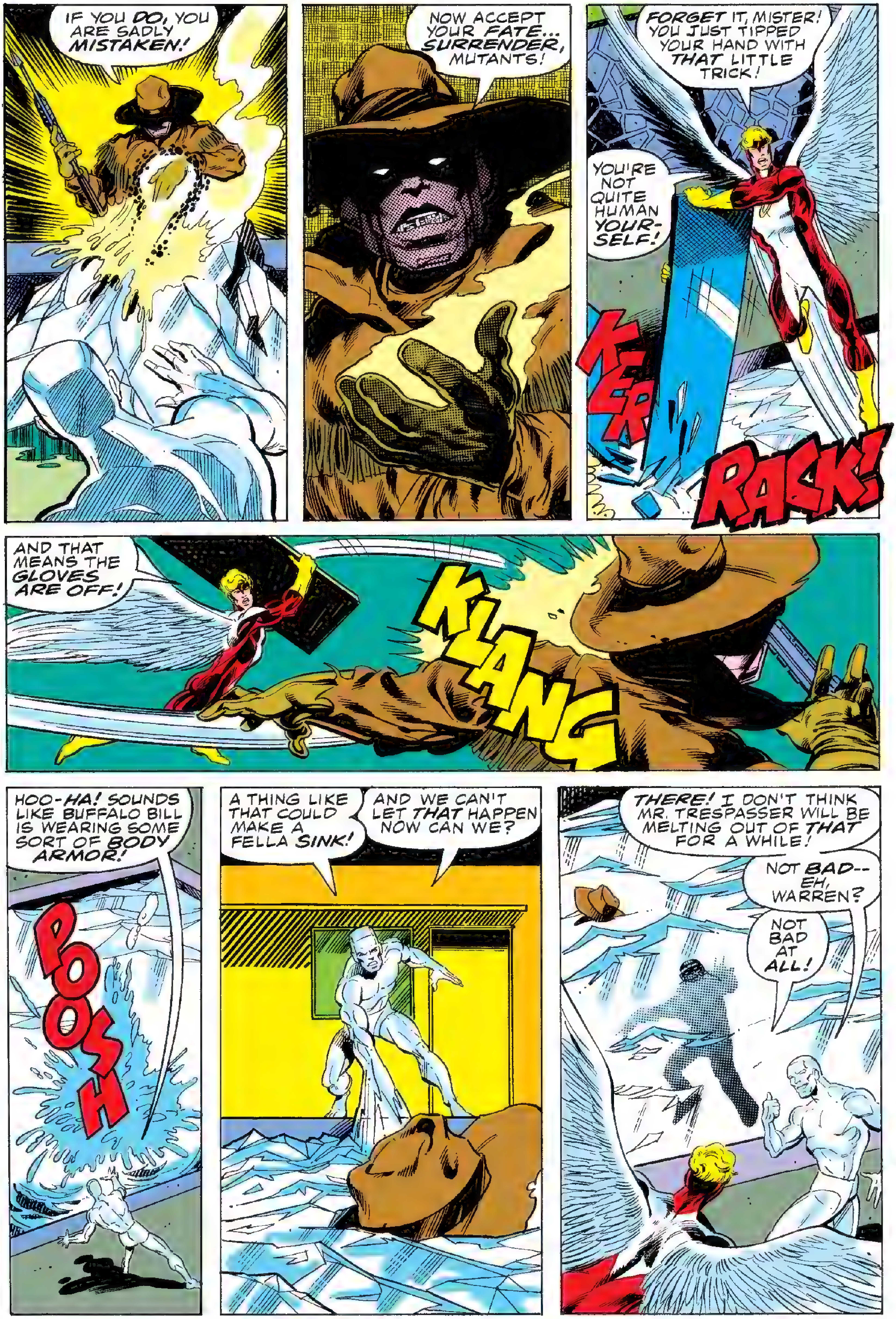

--THE HOPE REMAINS THAT THIS TIME THE NATION'S HULK PROBLEM MAY AT LAST BE RESOLVED!
CHARLES P. IRWIN... CBS NEWS... AT GAMMA BASE.
A FINE REPORT, IRWIN. I'VE RARELY SEEN THE MEDIA TREAT GAMMA BASE SO FAIRLY.
WE DO OUR BEST, DOCTOR SAMSON.
TELL ME, WHAT ARE MY CHANCES OF INTERVIEWING THE HULK?
WHAT?!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING? THE HULK IS LIKE A BOMB WAITING TO GO OFF! THE SLIGHTEST ANGER... ANXIETY... YOU NAME IT, AND WE'VE GOT A RAGING MONSTER ON OUR HANDS!
LOOK, DOC, I'VE COVERED 'NAM AND ANGOLA! I DON'T SCARE!
KA-PLANG
WHAT THE DEVIL?!
YOU WERE SAYING, MR. IRWIN?
HULK IS TIRED OF THIS PLACE!
HULK WANTS OUT... NOW!
I WAS AFRAID OF THIS. HE'S GOTTEN SLIGHTLY CLAUSTROPHOBIC, AND HE'S REACTED IN THE MOST DIRECT MANNER!
GET OUT OF HULK'S WAY!
MY GOD... I NEVER REALIZED HE WAS SO... BIG!

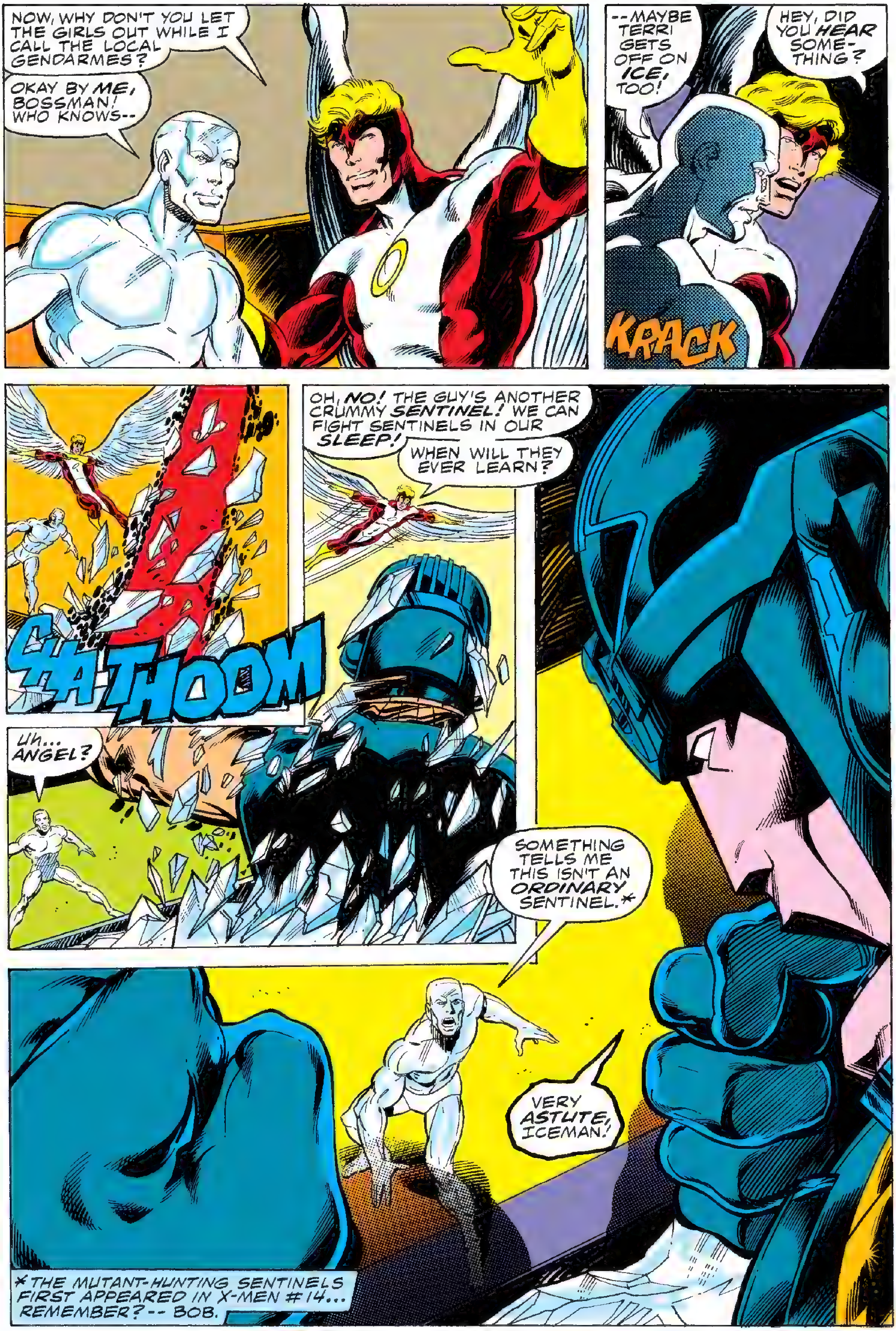

WHOOP!
SORRY, MR. IRWIN, BUT YOU'LL BE SAFER UP THERE!
NOW... I KNOW YOU'RE UPSET, HULK. BUT WE ALL WANT TO HELP... SO WHY DON'T YOU--?
SAMSON--
--YOU TALK TOO MUCH!
HULK STILL HASN'T FORGOTTEN HOW YOU TRICKED HULK... CALLED HULK STUPID!*
YEAH, WELL, I WAS WRONG, HULK--AND I ADMIT IT! YOU ARE DEFINITELY NOT STUPID!
*HULK #225--BOB.
YES, BUT YOU STILL TALK TO HULK AS IF HULK WAS STUPID!
URK
AND HULK HATES THAT!
HULK! WHAT'RE YA DOIN' TO THE DOC?
IT'S OKAY, JIM... I'M FINE.
I THINK.
U.S.
US ARMY FORD

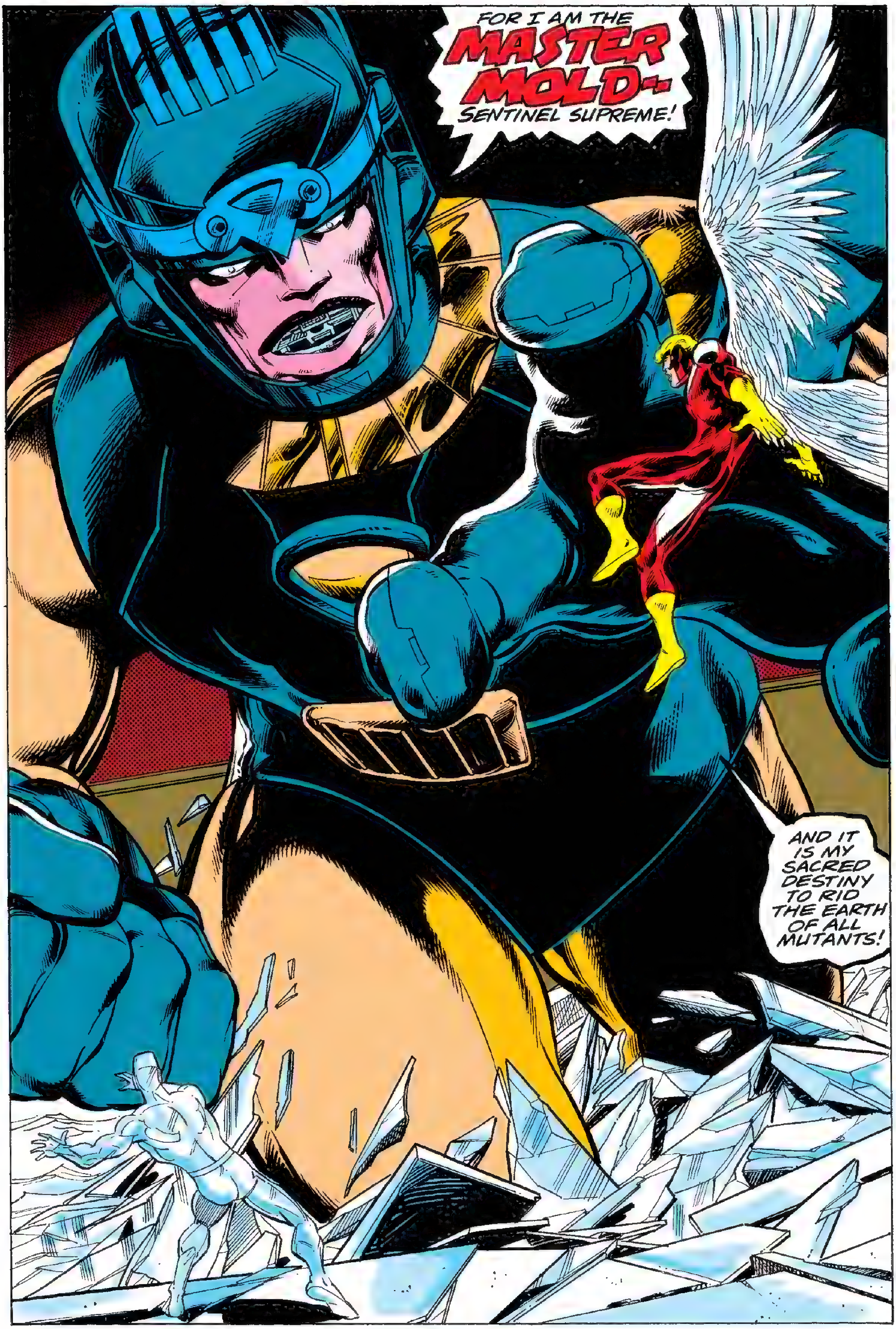

HEY, TAKE IT EASY, M'MAN! WE KNOW YOU'VE HAD SOME HARD TIMES, BUT WE CAN WORK IT OUT.
STILL FRIENDS?
STILL... FRIENDS, JIM!
BLESS YOU, JIM! HE'S CALM AGAIN. WE MAY HAVE A CHANCE OF "CURING" THE HULK YET!
EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, THE CUSTOM AIRCRAFT ONCE BELONGING TO THE CHAMPIONS DIPS DOWN INTO THE NEW MEXICAN ROCKIES FOR A PERFECT VERTICAL LANDING AT CHATEAU WORTHINGTON.
HELLO, DOWN THERE!
BOBBY! HOW NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
HI.
HIYA, CANDY!
HULLO.
OH! CANDY SOUTHERN, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET TERESA SUE BOTTOMS!
YOU CAN CALL ME... TERRI...
BOY, THIS IS REALLY SOME SPREAD, ISN'T IT, TERRI?
TERRI?
HI, I'M WARREN WORTHINGTON.
UH... UH... UH...

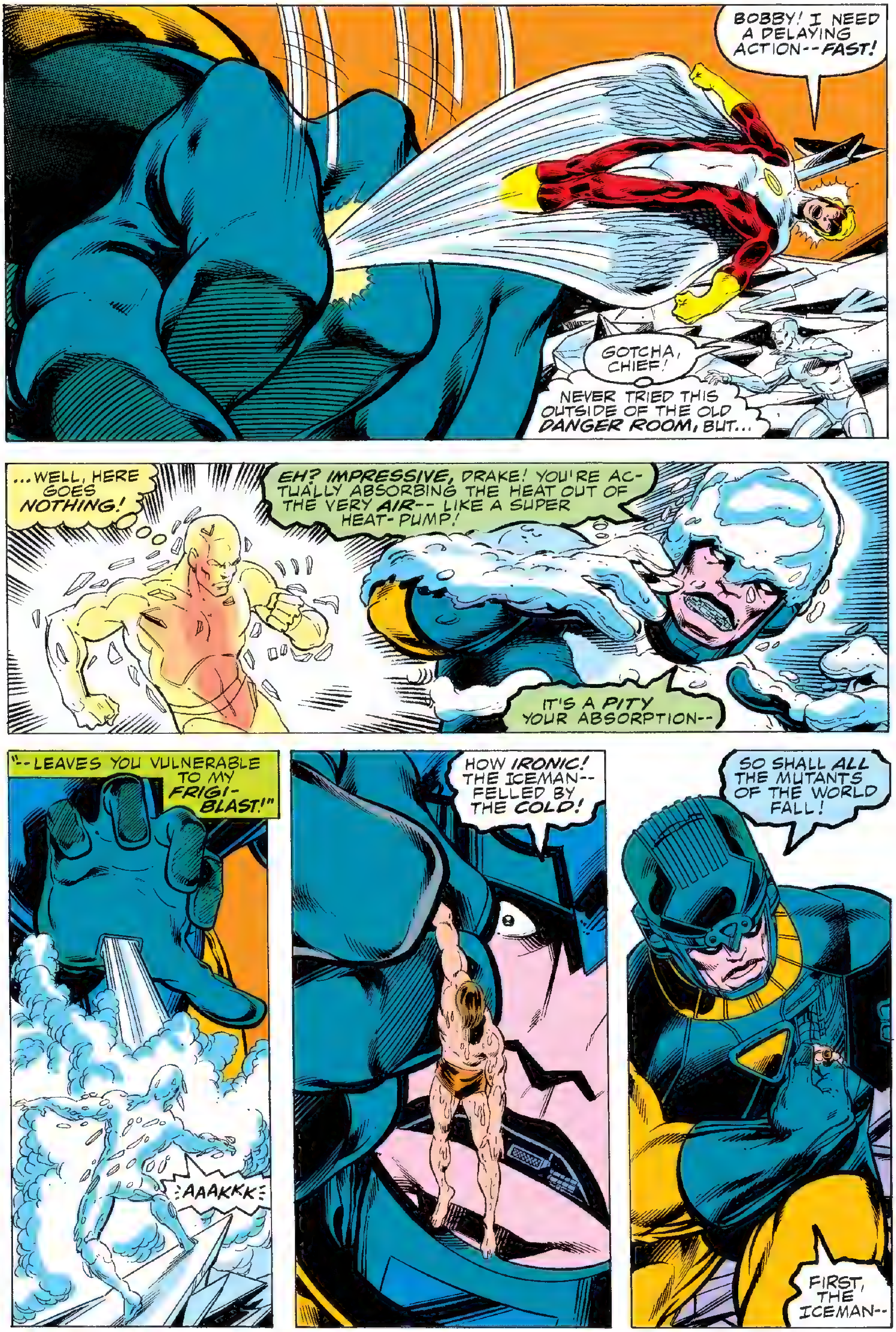

OH, MR. WORTHINGTON, I'VE READ SO MUCH ABOUT YOU, AND WHEN BOBBY TOLD ME THAT HE KNEW YOU, AND WE WERE COMING HERE, WHY, I WAS JUST SO EXCITED, YA KNOW?!
HEY... CALL ME WARREN, OKAY?
ENTHUSIASTIC, ISN'T SHE?
WHY DO I GET THE FEELING THIS ISN'T MY DAY?
AND WHILE THE FOURSOME GETS BETTER ACQUAINTED, HALFWAY UP A NEARBY PEAK A BUCKSKIN-CLAD FIGURE COMES OUT OF HIS CAVE AND STARTS DOWN THE MOUNTAIN TOWARDS...
POOLSIDE, SOME MINUTES LATER...
I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYONE GUSH LIKE THAT SINCE HIGH SCHOOL. I'M SURPRISED SHE HASN'T GONE IN AFTER WARREN.
AW, GIVE ME A BREAK, CANDY. SURE TERRI'S A LITTLE IMMATURE, BUT...
OKAY, TERRI ...I'VE PUT IT ON! NOW ARE YOU SATISFIED?
OH... GOLLY!
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? SHE PUTS MORE FEELING INTO THAT "GOLLY" THAN SHE'S PUT INTO ANYTHING SHE'S EVER SAID TO ME!
HEY, IS SOMETHING WRONG CANDY? I MEAN, BESIDES...
I DON'T KNOW--
--BUT GRIZZLY ADAMS UP THERE DOESN'T LEAVE ME FEELING SAFE AND SECURE!
UH-OH! WARREN, I THINK WE'VE GOT TROUBLE!

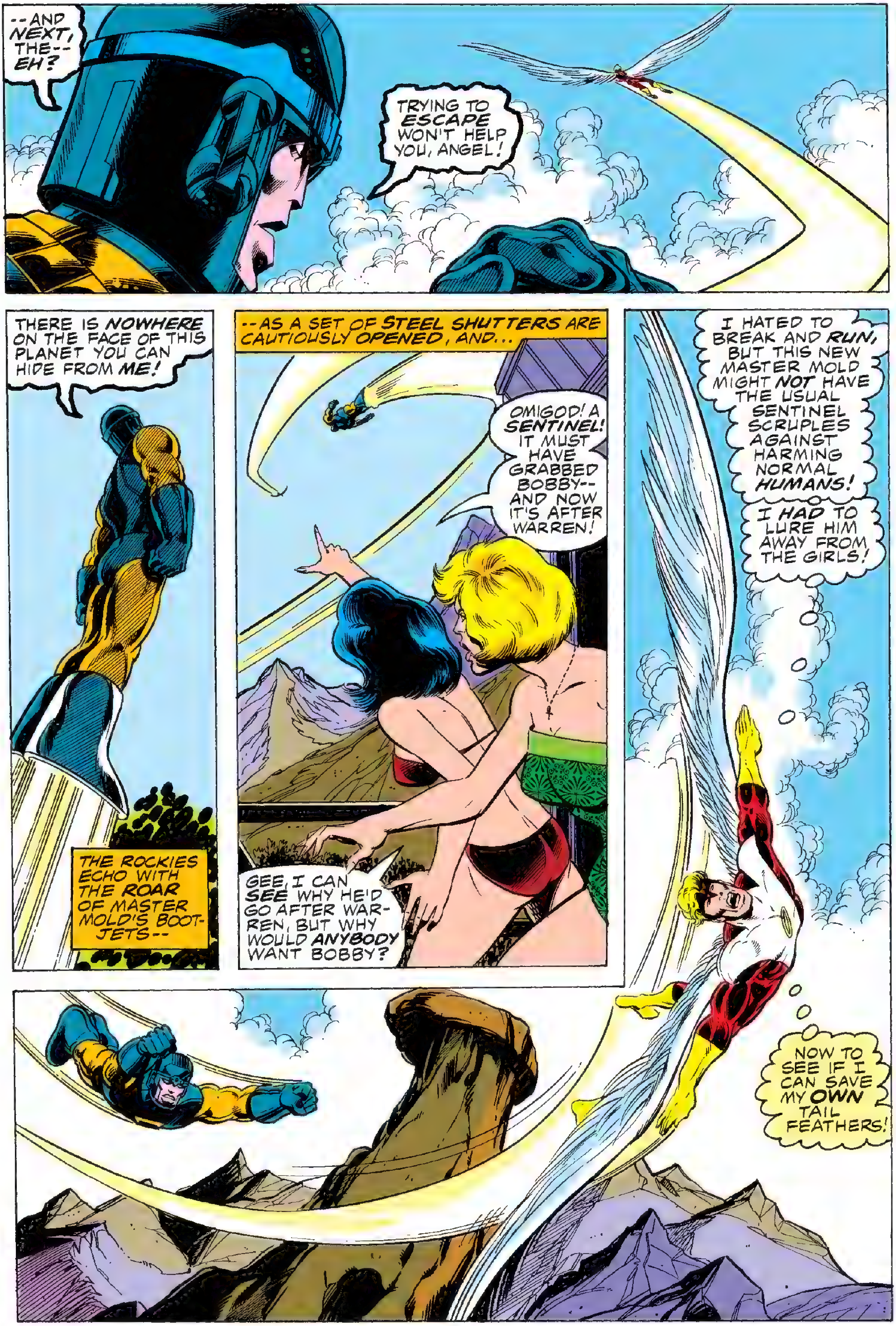

TAKE IT EASY, PEOPLE. MAYBE THE MAN'S JUST LOST.
HELLO, SIR. IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO FOR YOU?
YES, THERE IS.
YOU CAN SURRENDER-- OR DIE!
HOLY--!
BEEYOOW
GIRLS, GET UPSTAIRS AND BOLT YOURSELVES IN!
NO WAY! IF YOU'RE IN DANGER, WE'RE STAYING!
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? IF WE STAY HERE, WE'LL ONLY GET IN THE BOYS' WAY!
BUT I--!
COME ON!
HMMMM
BELIEVE ME, HON-- THE BOYS CAN HANDLE THIS!
ESPECIALLY IF BOBBY IS WHO I THINK HE IS.
BOBBY? I THOUGHT--!
SECRET IDENTITIES BE HANGED, WARREN! YOU COULD USE THE ICEMAN!
DO YOU THINK THIS WILL STOP ME, DRAKE?

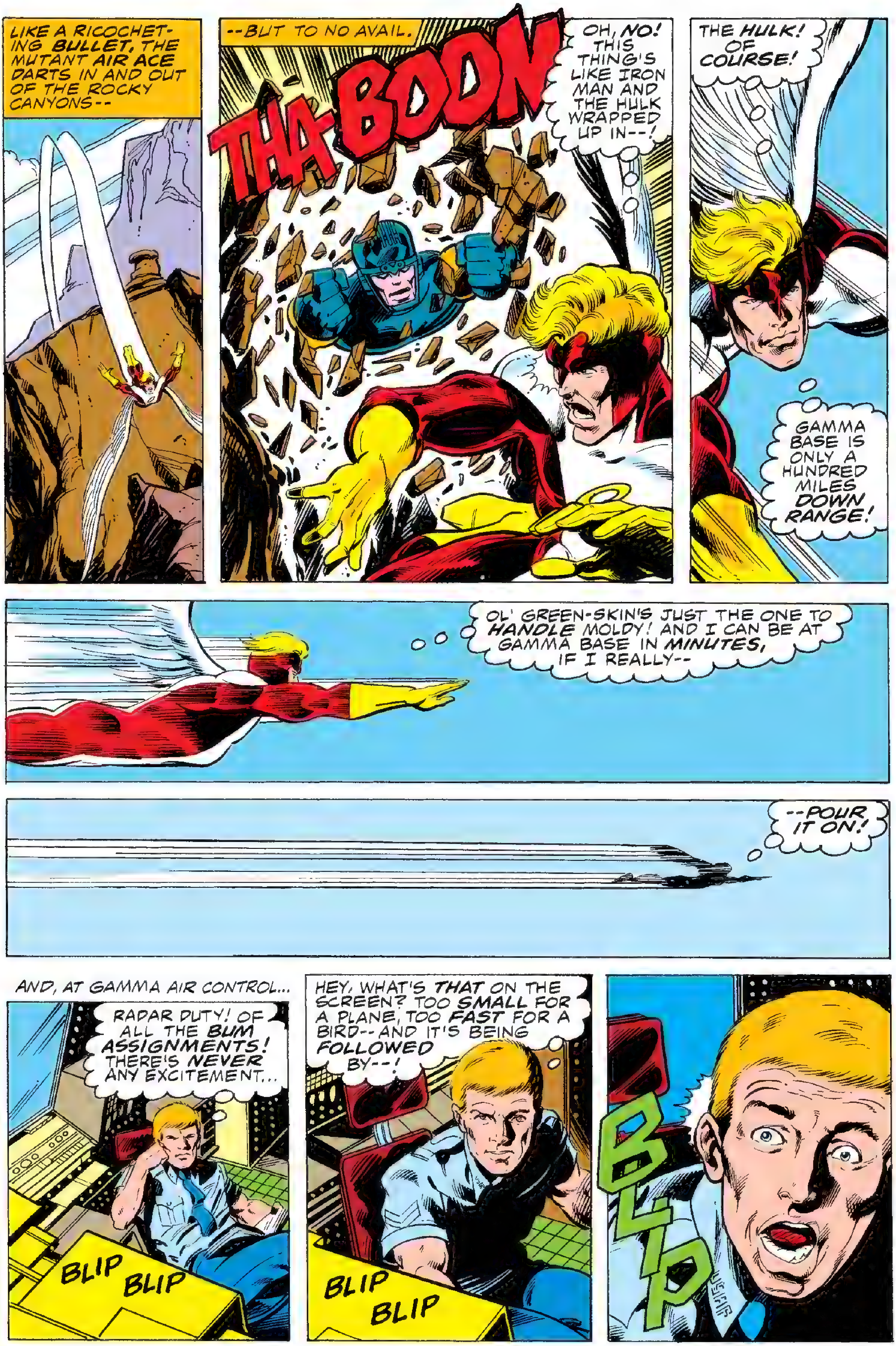

IF YOU *DO*, YOU ARE SADLY *MISTAKEN!*
NOW ACCEPT YOUR *FATE...* *SURRENDER,* MUTANTS!
FORGET IT, MISTER! YOU JUST TIPPED YOUR HAND WITH *THAT* LITTLE TRICK!
YOU'RE NOT QUITE HUMAN *YOURSELF!*
KER RACK!
AND THAT MEANS THE *GLOVES ARE OFF!*
KLANG
HOO-*HA!* SOUNDS LIKE BUFFALO BILL IS WEARING SOME SORT OF *BODY ARMOR!*
POOSH
A THING LIKE THAT COULD MAKE A FELLA *SINK!*
AND WE CAN'T LET *THAT* HAPPEN NOW CAN WE?
THERE! I DON'T THINK MR. TRESPASSER WILL BE MELTING OUT OF *THAT* FOR A WHILE!
NOT *BAD*--EH, WARREN?
NOT BAD AT *ALL!*

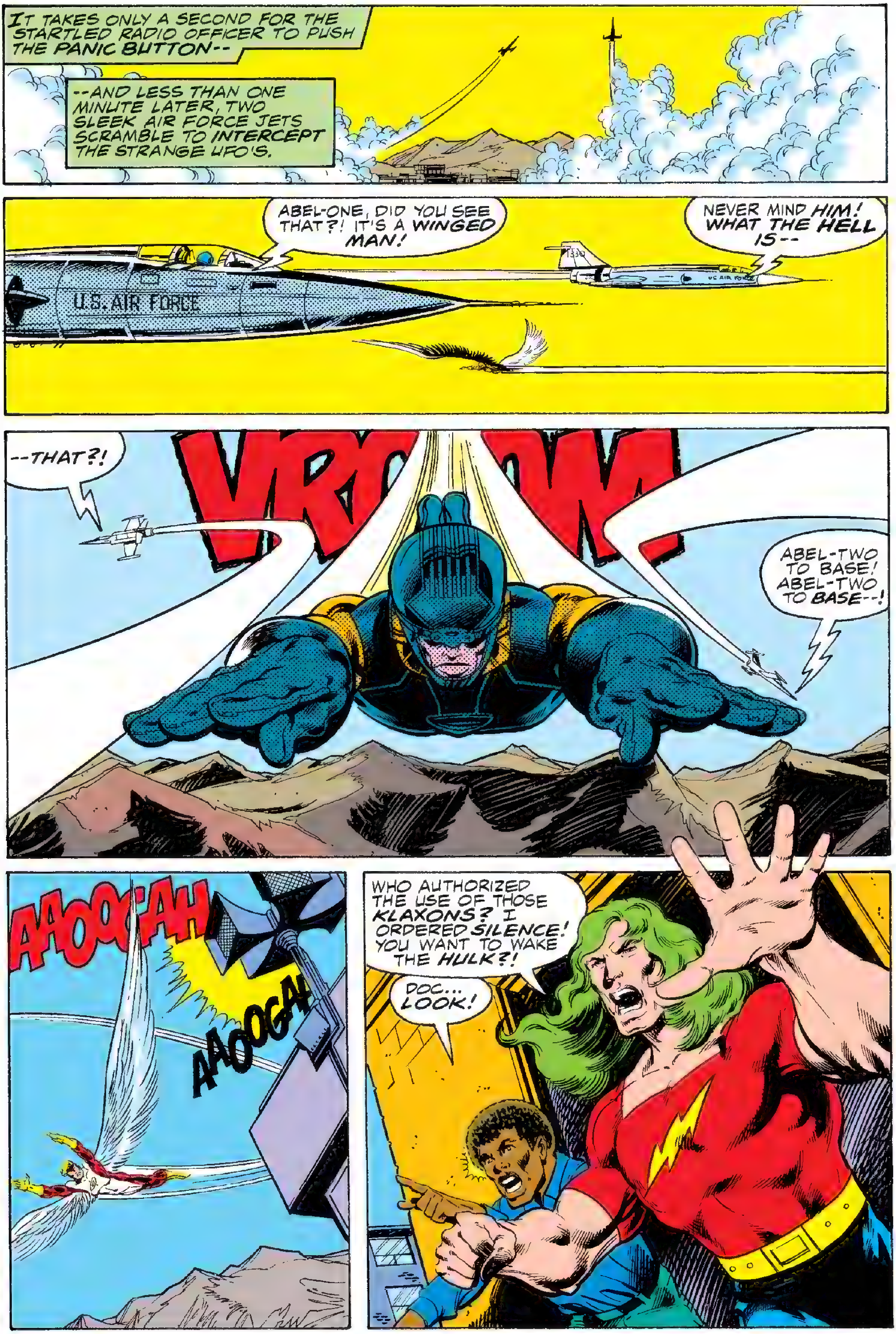

NOW, WHY DON'T YOU LET THE GIRLS OUT WHILE I CALL THE LOCAL GENDARMES?
OKAY BY *ME*, BOSSMAN! WHO KNOWS--
--MAYBE TERRI GETS OFF ON *ICE*, TOO!
HEY, DID YOU *HEAR* SOME-THING?
KRACK
SHA-THOOM
OH, *NO!* THE GUY'S ANOTHER CRUMMY *SENTINEL!* WE CAN FIGHT SENTINELS IN OUR *SLEEP!*
WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN?
UH... *ANGEL?*
SOMETHING TELLS ME THIS ISN'T AN *ORDINARY* SENTINEL.*
VERY *ASTUTE*, ICEMAN!
*THE MUTANT-HUNTING SENTINELS FIRST APPEARED IN X-MEN #14... REMEMBER? -- BOB.

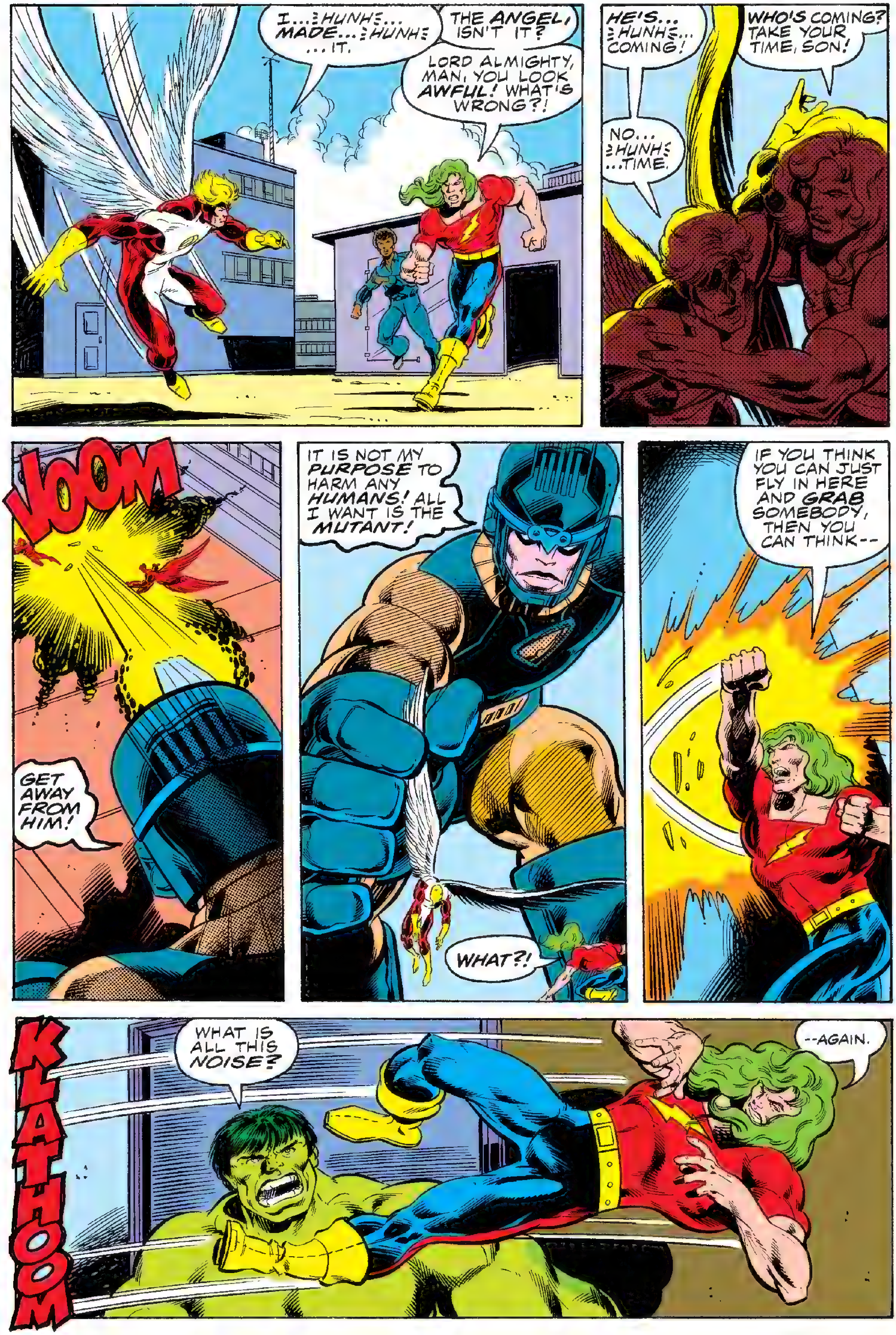

FOR I AM THE MASTER MOLD-- SENTINEL SUPREME!
AND IT IS MY SACRED DESTINY TO RID THE EARTH OF ALL MUTANTS!


BOBBY! I NEED A DELAYING ACTION--*FAST!*
GOTCHA, CHIEF!
NEVER TRIED THIS OUTSIDE OF THE OLD *DANGER ROOM*, BUT...
...WELL, HERE GOES *NOTHING!*
EH? IMPRESSIVE, DRAKE! YOU'RE ACTUALLY ABSORBING THE HEAT OUT OF THE VERY *AIR*-- LIKE A SUPER HEAT-PUMP!
IT'S A *PITY* YOUR ABSORPTION--
"--LEAVES YOU VULNERABLE TO MY *FRIGI-BLAST!*"
AAAKKK
HOW *IRONIC!* THE ICEMAN-- FELLED BY THE *COLD!*
SO SHALL *ALL* THE MUTANTS OF THE WORLD FALL!
FIRST, THE ICEMAN--

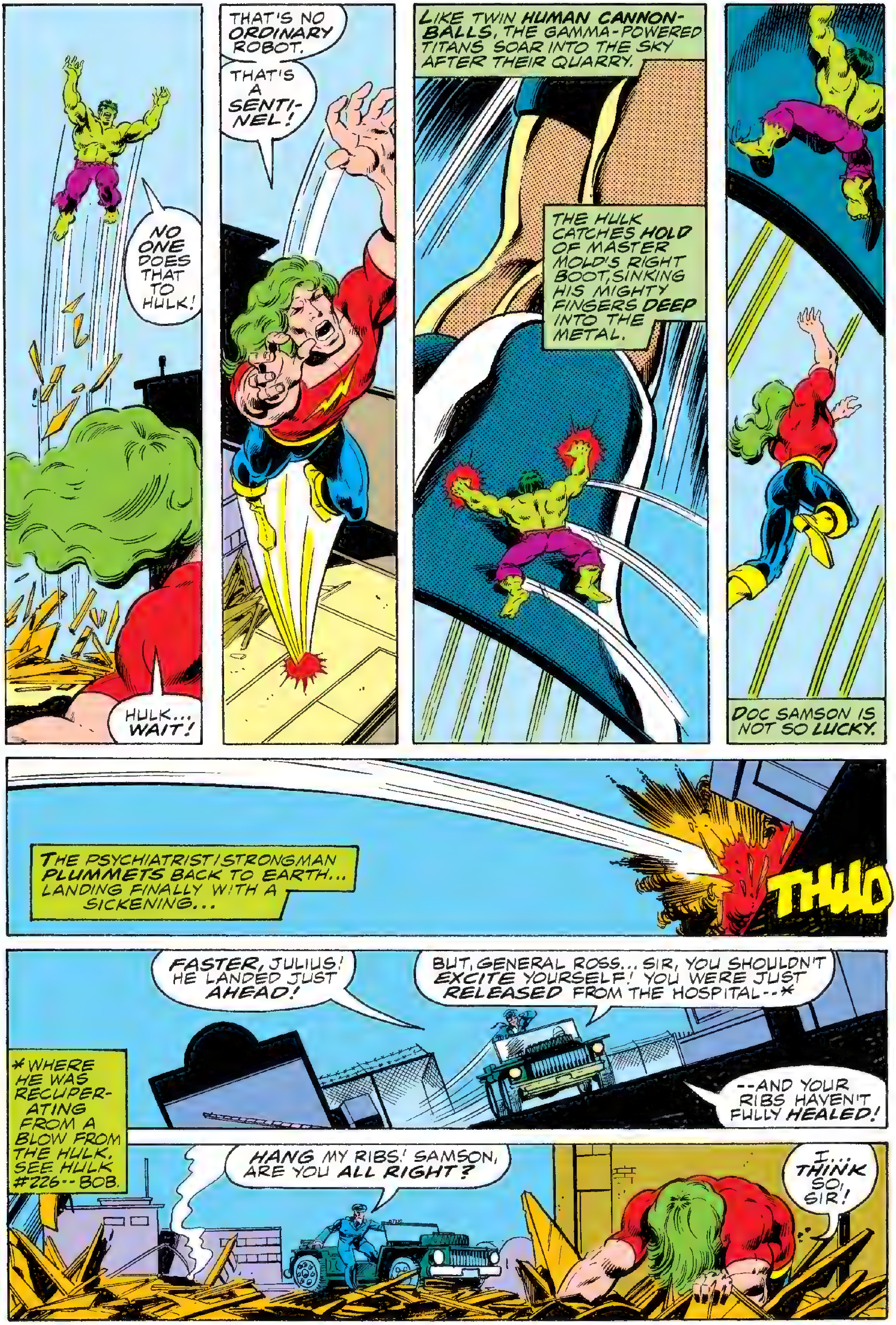

--AND NEXT, THE-- EH?
TRYING TO ESCAPE WON'T HELP YOU, ANGEL!
THERE IS NOWHERE ON THE FACE OF THIS PLANET YOU CAN HIDE FROM ME!
THE ROCKIES ECHO WITH THE ROAR OF MASTER MOLD'S BOOT-JETS--
--AS A SET OF STEEL SHUTTERS ARE CAUTIOUSLY OPENED, AND...
OMIGOD! A SENTINEL! IT MUST HAVE GRABBED BOBBY-- AND NOW IT'S AFTER WARREN!
GEE, I CAN SEE WHY HE'D GO AFTER WARREN, BUT WHY WOULD ANYBODY WANT BOBBY?
I HATED TO BREAK AND RUN, BUT THIS NEW MASTER MOLD MIGHT NOT HAVE THE USUAL SENTINEL SCRUPLES AGAINST HARMING NORMAL HUMANS!
I HAD TO LURE HIM AWAY FROM THE GIRLS!
NOW TO SEE IF I CAN SAVE MY OWN TAIL FEATHERS!

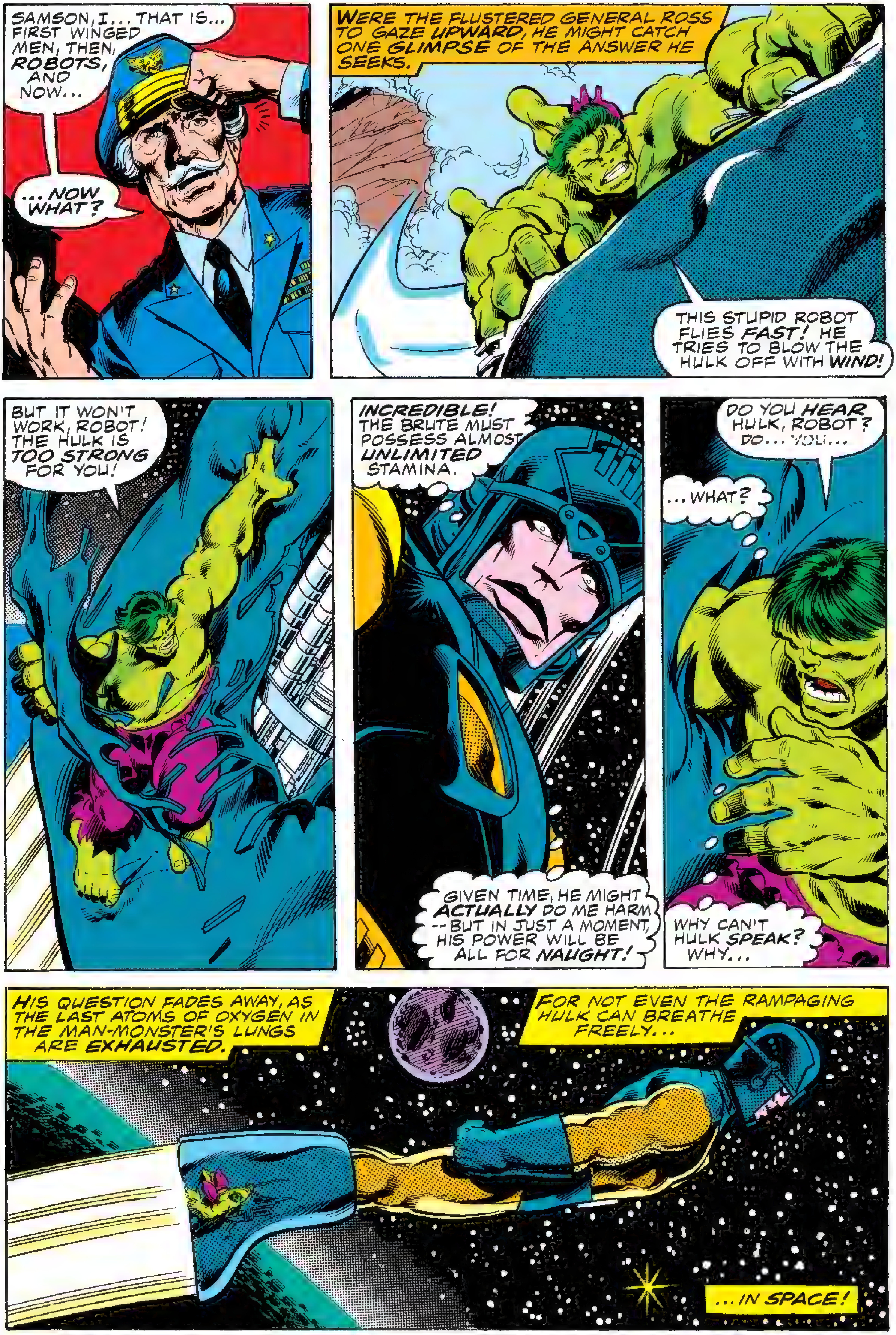

LIKE A RICOCHETING **BULLET**, THE MUTANT **AIR ACE** DARTS IN AND OUT OF THE ROCKY CANYONS--
--BUT TO NO AVAIL.
THA-BOOM
OH, **NO!** THIS THING'S LIKE IRON MAN AND THE HULK WRAPPED UP IN--!
THE **HULK!** OF COURSE!
GAMMA BASE IS ONLY A HUNDRED MILES **DOWN RANGE!**
OL' GREEN-SKIN'S JUST THE ONE TO **HANDLE** MOLDY! AND I CAN BE AT GAMMA BASE IN **MINUTES,** IF I REALLY--
--**POUR IT ON!**
AND, AT GAMMA AIR CONTROL...
RADAR DUTY! OF ALL THE **BUM ASSIGNMENTS!** THERE'S **NEVER** ANY EXCITEMENT...
BLIP BLIP
HEY, WHAT'S **THAT** ON THE SCREEN? TOO **SMALL** FOR A PLANE, TOO **FAST** FOR A BIRD--AND IT'S BEING **FOLLOWED** BY--!
BLIP BLIP
BLIP

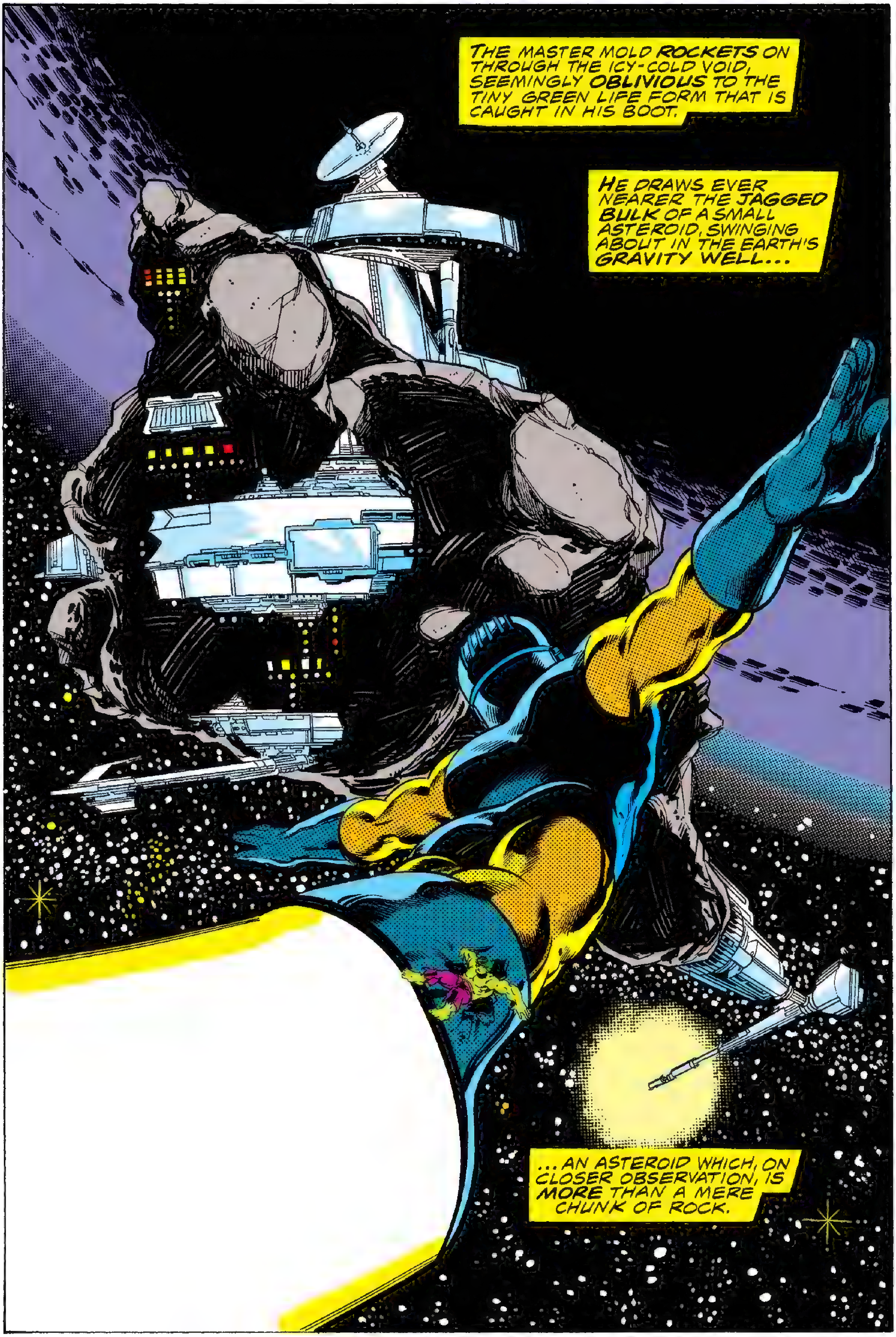

IT TAKES ONLY A SECOND FOR THE STARTLED RADIO OFFICER TO PUSH THE PANIC BUTTON--
--AND LESS THAN ONE MINUTE LATER, TWO SLEEK AIR FORCE JETS SCRAMBLE TO INTERCEPT THE STRANGE UFO'S.
ABEL-ONE, DID YOU SEE THAT?! IT'S A WINGED MAN!
NEVER MIND HIM! WHAT THE HELL IS--
U.S. AIR FORCE
--THAT?!
VROOM
ABEL-TWO TO BASE! ABEL-TWO TO BASE--!
AAOOGAH
AAOOGA!
WHO AUTHORIZED THE USE OF THOSE KLAXONS? I ORDERED SILENCE! YOU WANT TO WAKE THE HULK?!
DOC... LOOK!

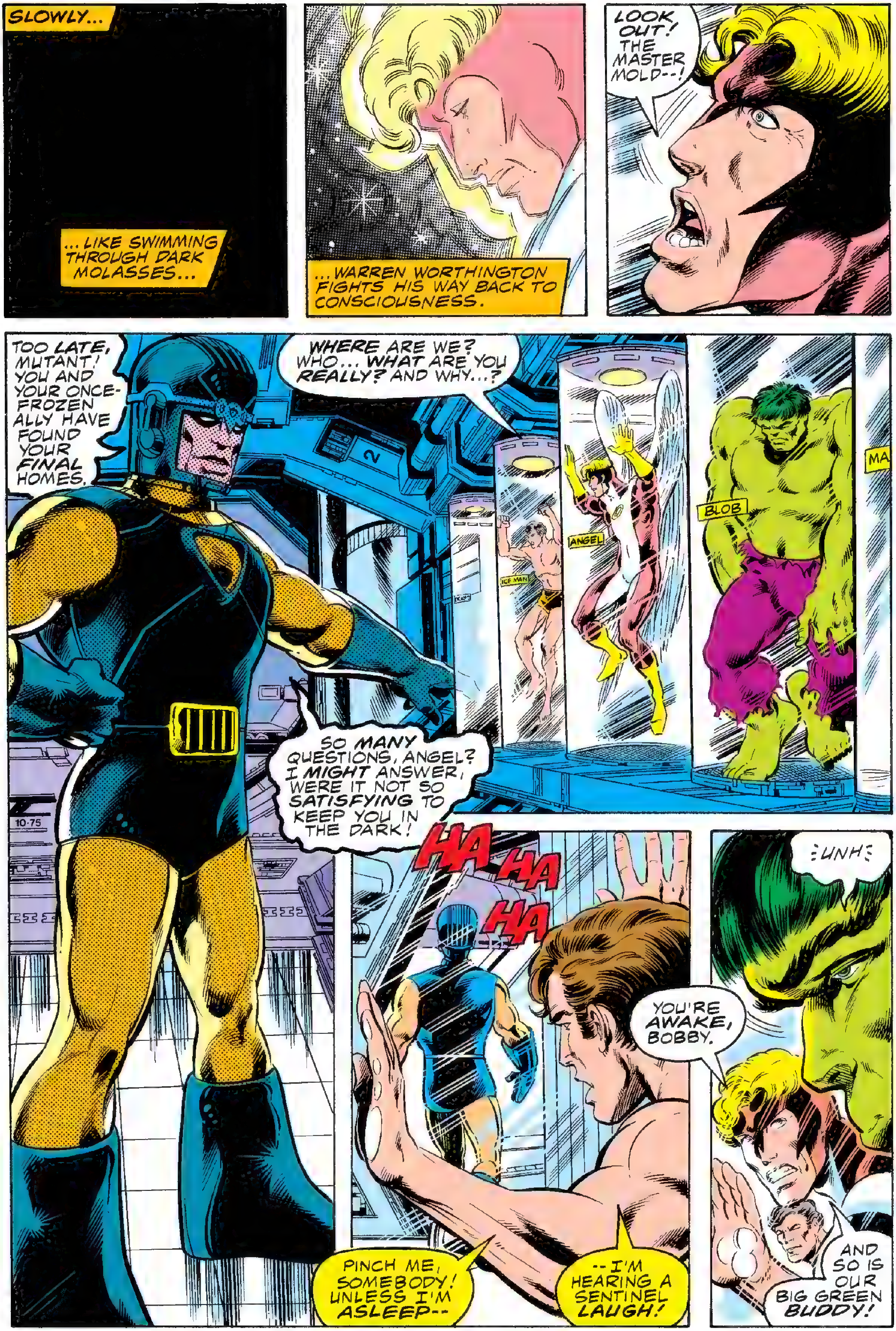

I... HUNH... MADE... HUNH ...IT.
THE ANGEL, ISN'T IT?
LORD ALMIGHTY, MAN, YOU LOOK AWFUL! WHAT'S WRONG?!
HE'S... HUNH... COMING!
WHO'S COMING? TAKE YOUR TIME, SON!
NO... HUNH ...TIME.
VOOM
GET AWAY FROM HIM!
IT IS NOT MY PURPOSE TO HARM ANY HUMANS! ALL I WANT IS THE MUTANT!
WHAT?!
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST FLY IN HERE AND GRAB SOMEBODY, THEN YOU CAN THINK--
KLATHOOM
WHAT IS ALL THIS NOISE?
--AGAIN.

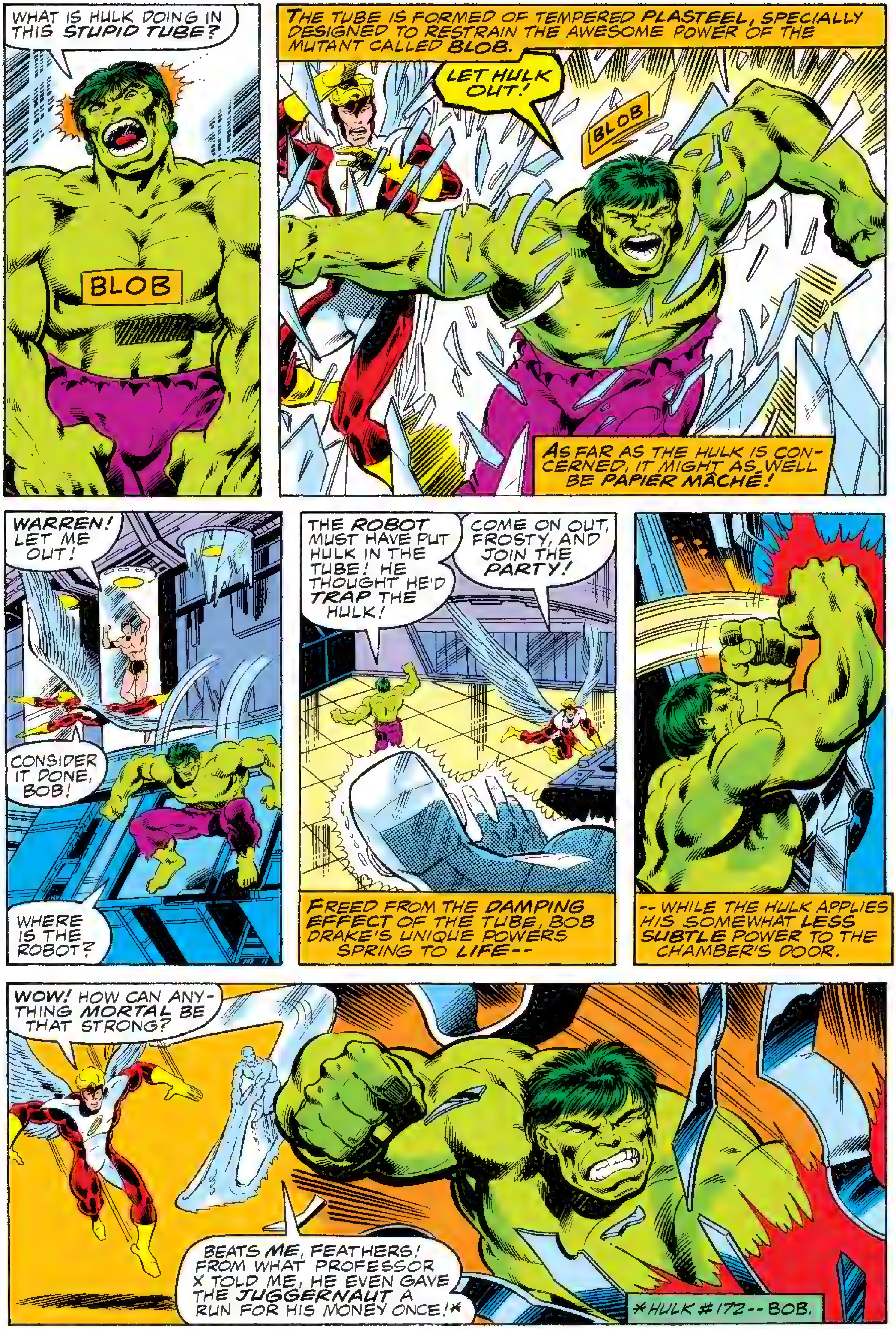
STAY OUT OF THIS, LITTLE MAN! IT DOES NOT CONCERN *YOU!*
MAN?! HULK IS *NO* LITTLE MAN! HULK IS *THE HULK!*
AND NO BIG ROBOT TELLS *HULK* WHAT TO DO!
OH, NO?
KROOM
WHAT *IS* THIS?! FIRST, ROBOT *SMASHES* HULK'S FRIEND--
--THEN, ROBOT TRIES TO SMASH *HULK!* AND NOW--
--*HULK IS WET AGAIN!*


NO ONE DOES THAT TO HULK!
HULK... WAIT!
THAT'S NO ORDINARY ROBOT.
THAT'S A SENTINEL!
LIKE TWIN HUMAN CANNONBALLS, THE GAMMA-POWERED TITANS SOAR INTO THE SKY AFTER THEIR QUARRY.
THE HULK CATCHES HOLD OF MASTER MOLD'S RIGHT BOOT, SINKING HIS MIGHTY FINGERS DEEP INTO THE METAL.
DOC SAMSON IS NOT SO LUCKY.
THE PSYCHIATRIST/STRONGMAN PLUMMETS BACK TO EARTH... LANDING FINALLY WITH A SICKENING...
THUD
FASTER, JULIUS! HE LANDED JUST AHEAD!
BUT, GENERAL ROSS... SIR, YOU SHOULDN'T EXCITE YOURSELF! YOU WERE JUST RELEASED FROM THE HOSPITAL--*
--AND YOUR RIBS HAVEN'T FULLY HEALED!
*WHERE HE WAS RECUPERATING FROM A BLOW FROM THE HULK. SEE HULK #226--BOB.
HANG MY RIBS! SAMSON, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I... THINK SO, SIR!

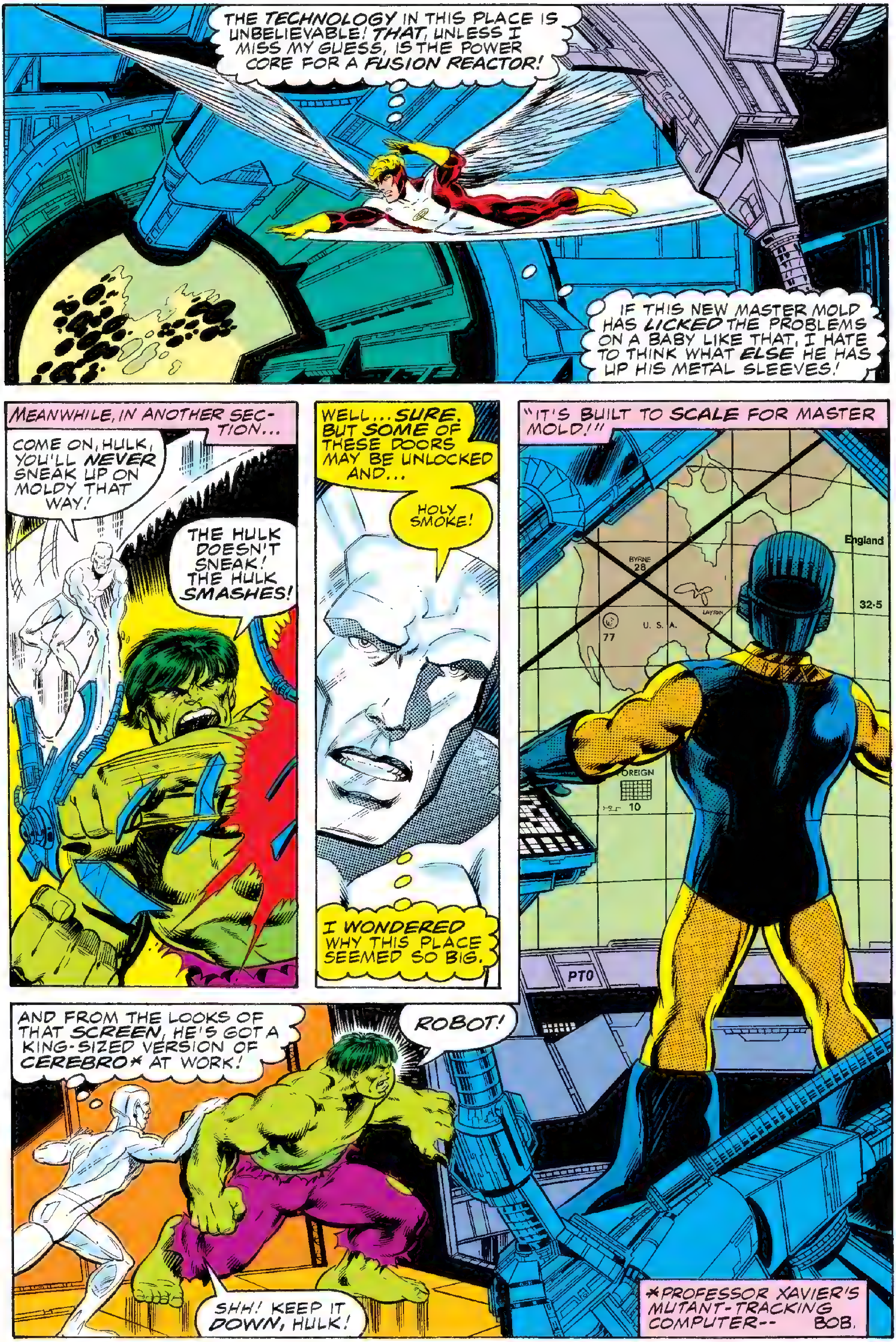

SAMSON, I... THAT IS... FIRST WINGED MEN, THEN, ROBOTS, AND NOW...
...NOW WHAT?
WERE THE FLUSTERED GENERAL ROSS TO GAZE UPWARD, HE MIGHT CATCH ONE GLIMPSE OF THE ANSWER HE SEEKS.
THIS STUPID ROBOT FLIES FAST! HE TRIES TO BLOW THE HULK OFF WITH WIND!
BUT IT WON'T WORK, ROBOT! THE HULK IS TOO STRONG FOR YOU!
INCREDIBLE! THE BRUTE MUST POSSESS ALMOST UNLIMITED STAMINA.
GIVEN TIME, HE MIGHT ACTUALLY DO ME HARM -- BUT IN JUST A MOMENT, HIS POWER WILL BE ALL FOR NAUGHT!
DO YOU HEAR HULK, ROBOT? DO... YOU...
...WHAT?
WHY CAN'T HULK SPEAK? WHY...
HIS QUESTION FADES AWAY, AS THE LAST ATOMS OF OXYGEN IN THE MAN-MONSTER'S LUNGS ARE EXHAUSTED.
FOR NOT EVEN THE RAMPAGING HULK CAN BREATHE FREELY...
...IN SPACE!

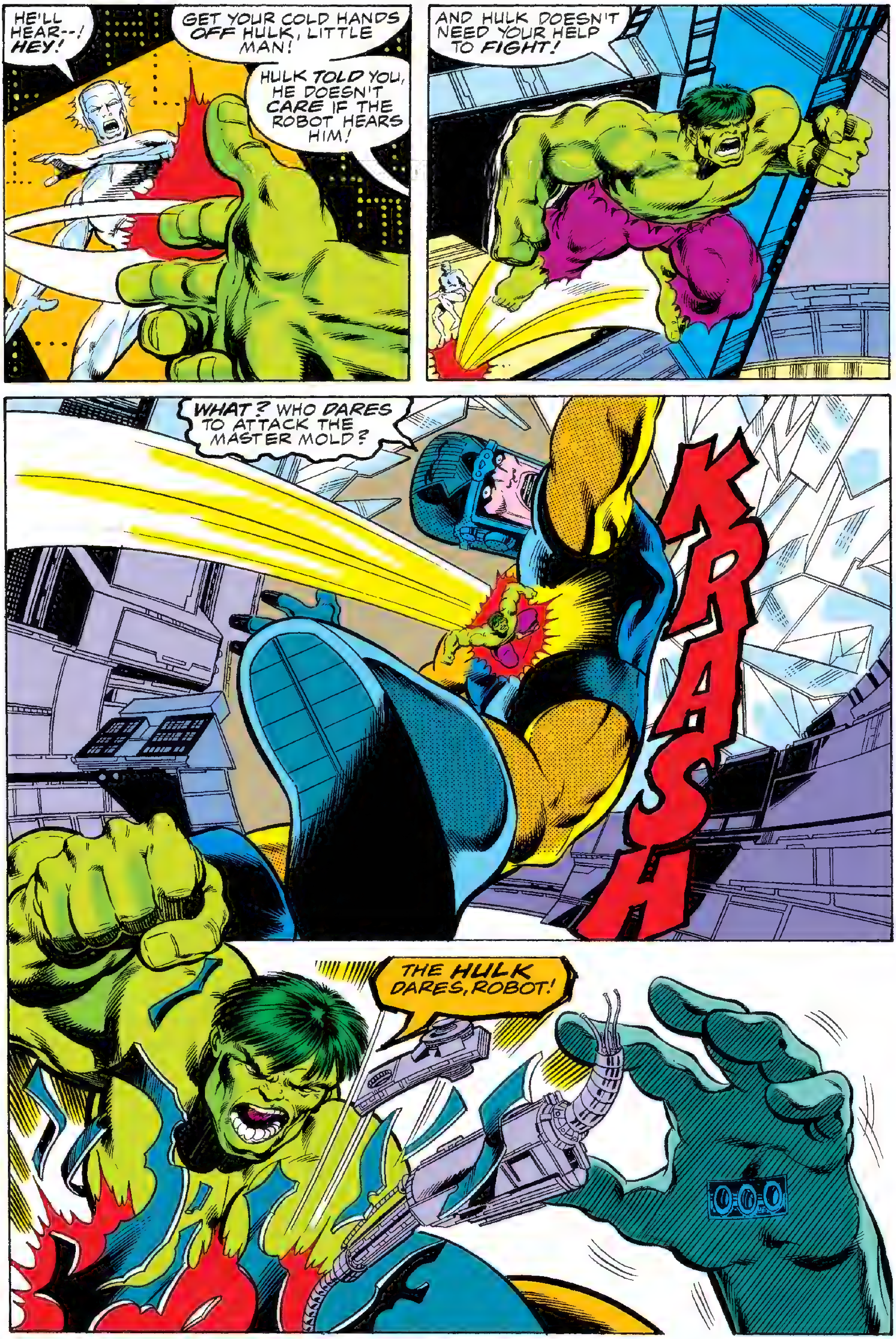

THE MASTER MOLD ROCKETS ON THROUGH THE ICY-COLD VOID, SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS TO THE TINY GREEN LIFE FORM THAT IS CAUGHT IN HIS BOOT.
HE DRAWS EVER NEARER THE JAGGED BULK OF A SMALL ASTEROID, SWINGING ABOUT IN THE EARTH'S GRAVITY WELL...
...AN ASTEROID WHICH, ON CLOSER OBSERVATION, IS MORE THAN A MERE CHUNK OF ROCK.

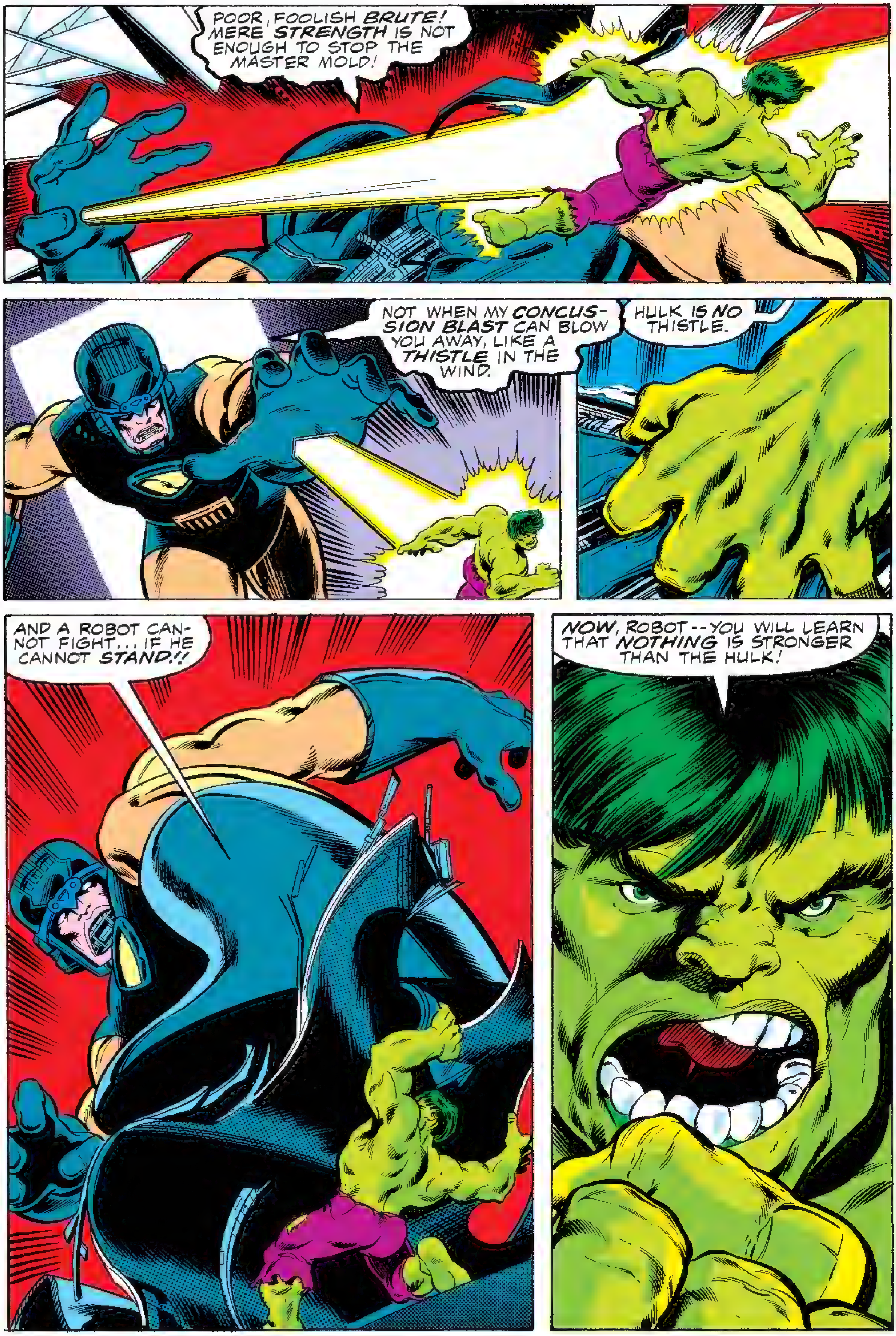

SLOWLY...
...LIKE SWIMMING THROUGH DARK MOLASSES...
...WARREN WORTHINGTON FIGHTS HIS WAY BACK TO CONSCIOUSNESS.
LOOK OUT! THE MASTER MOLD--!
TOO LATE, MUTANT! YOU AND YOUR ONCE-FROZEN ALLY HAVE FOUND YOUR FINAL HOMES.
WHERE ARE WE? WHO... WHAT ARE YOU REALLY? AND WHY...?
2
ICE MAN
ANGEL
BLOB
MA
10-75
SO MANY QUESTIONS, ANGEL? I MIGHT ANSWER, WERE IT NOT SO SATISFYING TO KEEP YOU IN THE DARK!
HA HA HA
PINCH ME, SOMEBODY! UNLESS I'M ASLEEP--
--I'M HEARING A SENTINEL LAUGH!
UNH
YOU'RE AWAKE, BOBBY.
AND SO IS OUR BIG GREEN BUDDY!

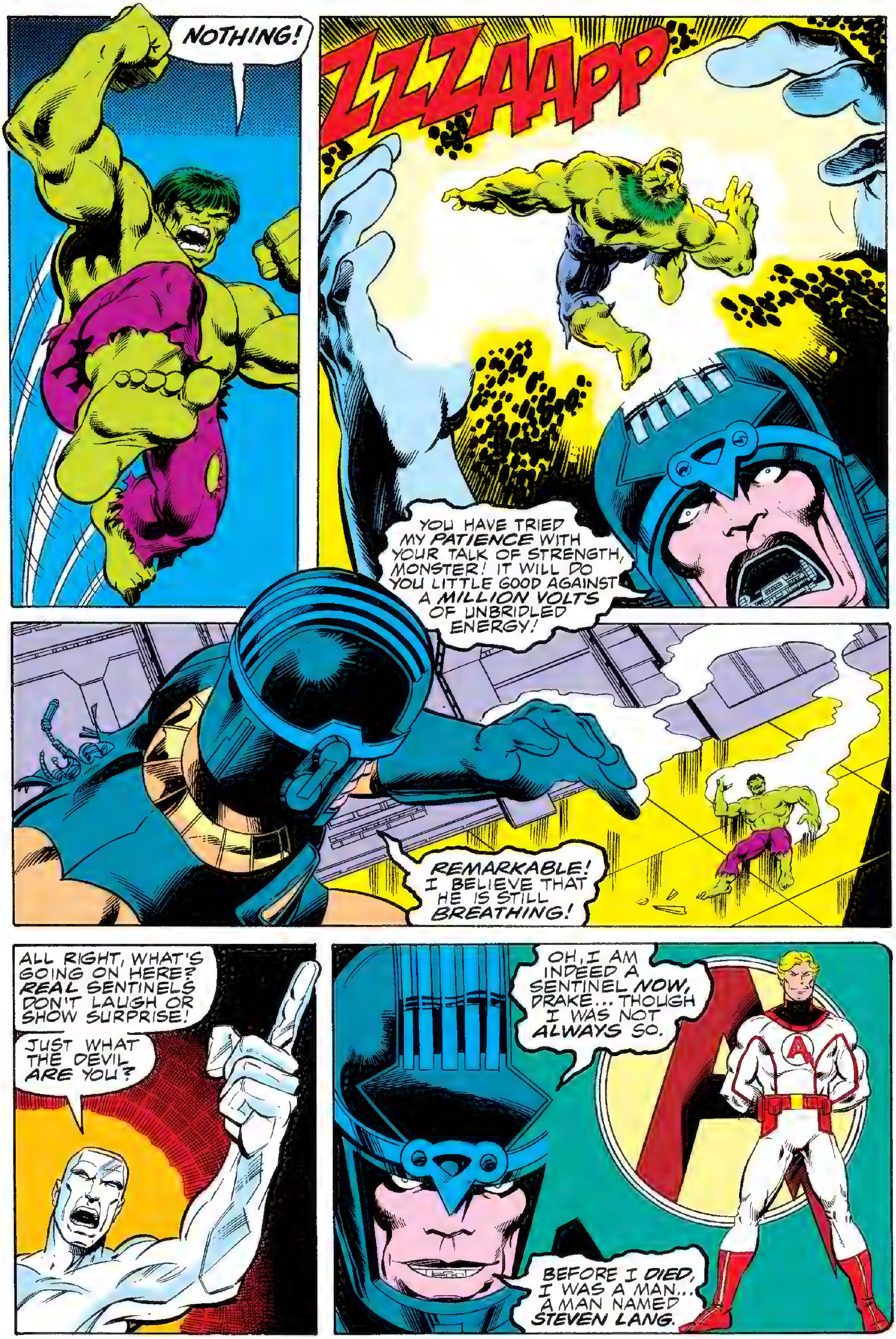

WHAT IS HULK DOING IN THIS STUPID TUBE?
BLOB
THE TUBE IS FORMED OF TEMPERED PLASTEEL, SPECIALLY DESIGNED TO RESTRAIN THE AWESOME POWER OF THE MUTANT CALLED BLOB.
LET HULK OUT!
BLOB
AS FAR AS THE HULK IS CONCERNED, IT MIGHT AS WELL BE PAPIER MÂCHÉ!
WARREN! LET ME OUT!
CONSIDER IT DONE, BOB!
WHERE IS THE ROBOT?
THE ROBOT MUST HAVE PUT HULK IN THE TUBE! HE THOUGHT HE'D TRAP THE HULK!
COME ON OUT, FROSTY, AND JOIN THE PARTY!
FREED FROM THE DAMPING EFFECT OF THE TUBE, BOB DRAKE'S UNIQUE POWERS SPRING TO LIFE--
-- WHILE THE HULK APPLIES HIS SOMEWHAT LESS SUBTLE POWER TO THE CHAMBER'S DOOR.
WOW! HOW CAN ANYTHING MORTAL BE THAT STRONG?
BEATS ME, FEATHERS! FROM WHAT PROFESSOR X TOLD ME, HE EVEN GAVE THE JUGGERNAUT A RUN FOR HIS MONEY ONCE!*
*HULK #172--BOB.

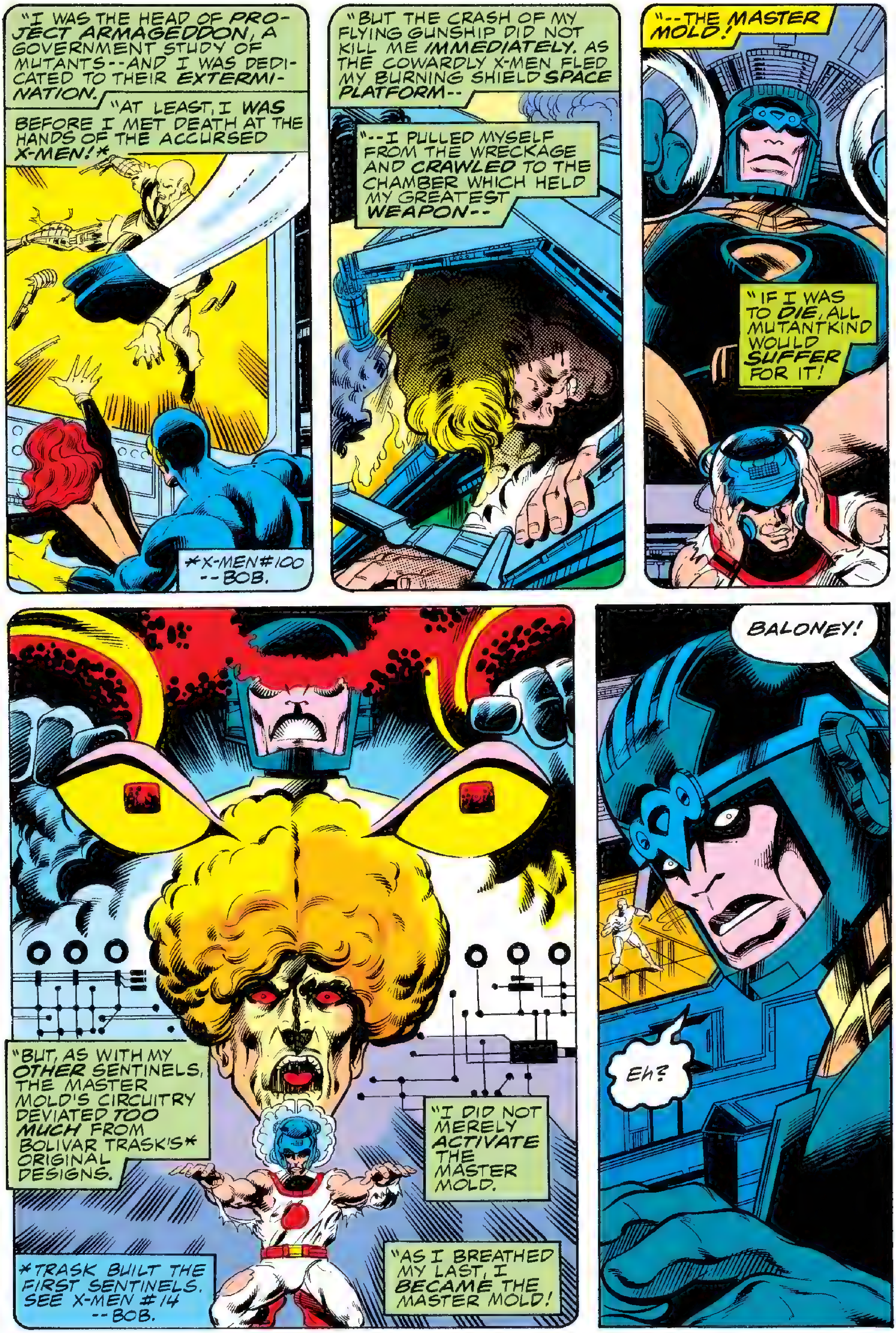
THE DOOR IS NEARLY A METER THICK, BUILT OF INTERTWINING BANDS OF THE HARDEST FORGED STEEL. IT FALLS IN LESS THAN 30 SECONDS.
ROBOT! HULK IS COMING FOR YOU!
BUT THE ROBOT IS NOT IN THE OBSERVATION CHAMBER. THE ONLY THING THERE...
--IS A VERY GOOD VIEW.
SPACE?!
OH, CRUD! WE'RE IN ORBIT! HOW DO WE GET DOWN TO EARTH FROM HERE?
HUNH! HULK HAS FALLEN FURTHER THAN THAT! HULK CAN GET DOWN EASILY!
BUT FIRST, HULK MUST SMASH THAT ROBOT!
THAT'S FINE FOR YOU, HULK, BUT ICEMAN AND I AREN'T AS STURDY AS YOU ARE!
BOBBY, KEEP HIM OUT OF TROUBLE. I'LL LOOK FOR A WAY OFF THIS THING!
YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?!
HEY... UH, HULK, OLD BUDDY... WHAT DO YOU SAY WE HANG OUT HERE UNTIL ANGEL GETS BACK?
HULK?
BAH!
I WAS AFRAID YOU'D SAY THAT!
OH, WELL! WAIT FOR ME, MR. GREEN!

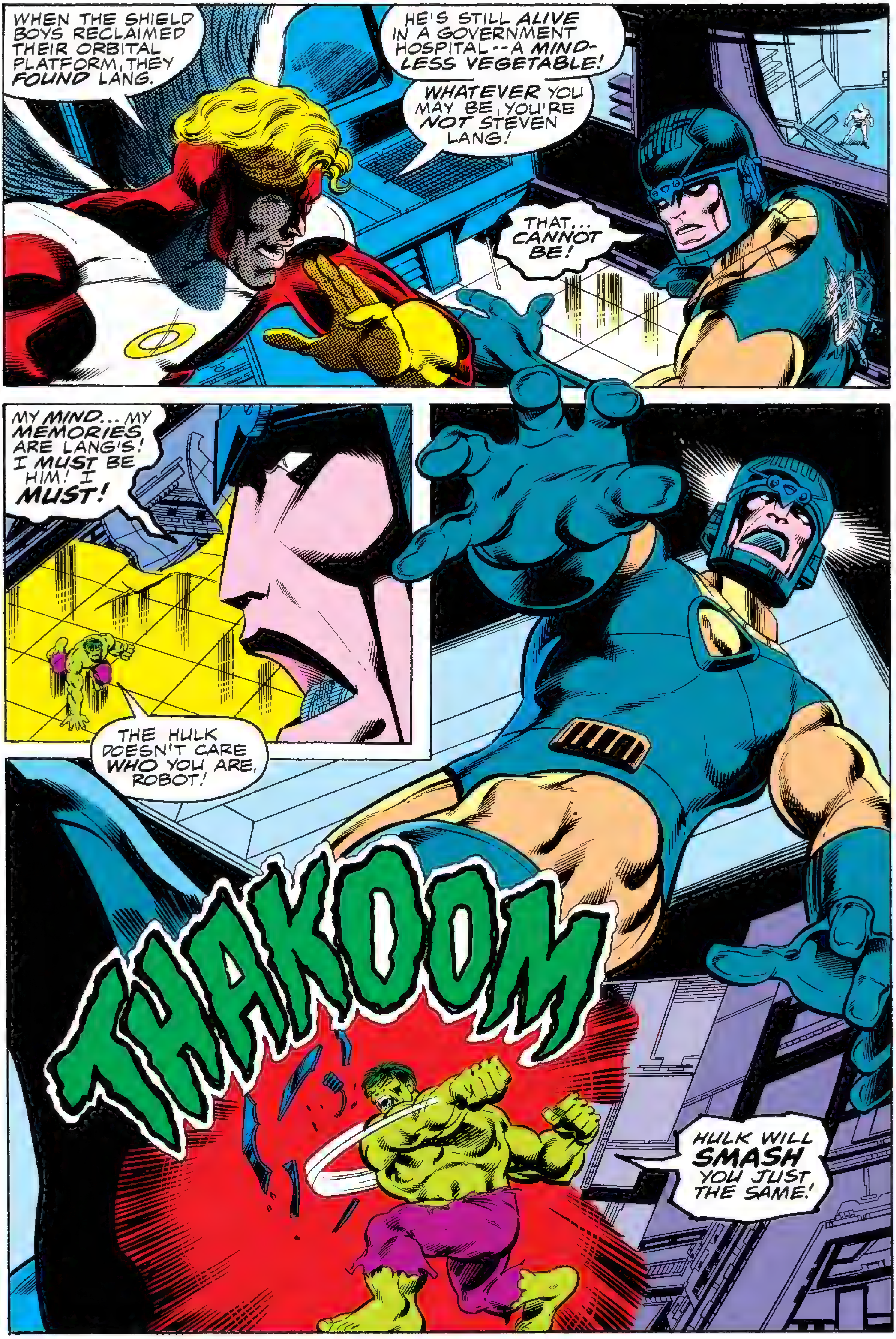

THE *TECHNOLOGY* IN THIS PLACE IS UNBELIEVABLE! *THAT,* UNLESS I MISS MY GUESS, IS THE POWER CORE FOR A *FUSION REACTOR!*
IF THIS NEW MASTER MOLD HAS *LICKED* THE PROBLEMS ON A BABY LIKE THAT, I HATE TO THINK WHAT *ELSE* HE HAS UP HIS METAL SLEEVES!
MEANWHILE, IN ANOTHER SECTION...
COME ON, HULK, YOU'LL *NEVER* SNEAK UP ON MOLDY THAT WAY!
THE HULK DOESN'T SNEAK! THE HULK *SMASHES!*
WELL... *SURE.* BUT *SOME* OF THESE DOORS MAY BE UNLOCKED AND...
HOLY SMOKE!
I WONDERED WHY THIS PLACE SEEMED SO BIG.
"IT'S BUILT TO *SCALE* FOR MASTER MOLD!"
England
BYRNE 28
32·5
LAYTON
U. S. A.
77
FOREIGN
10
PTO
AND FROM THE LOOKS OF THAT *SCREEN,* HE'S GOT A KING-SIZED VERSION OF *CEREBRO** AT WORK!
ROBOT!
SHH! KEEP IT *DOWN,* HULK!
*PROFESSOR XAVIER'S MUTANT-TRACKING COMPUTER-- BOB.

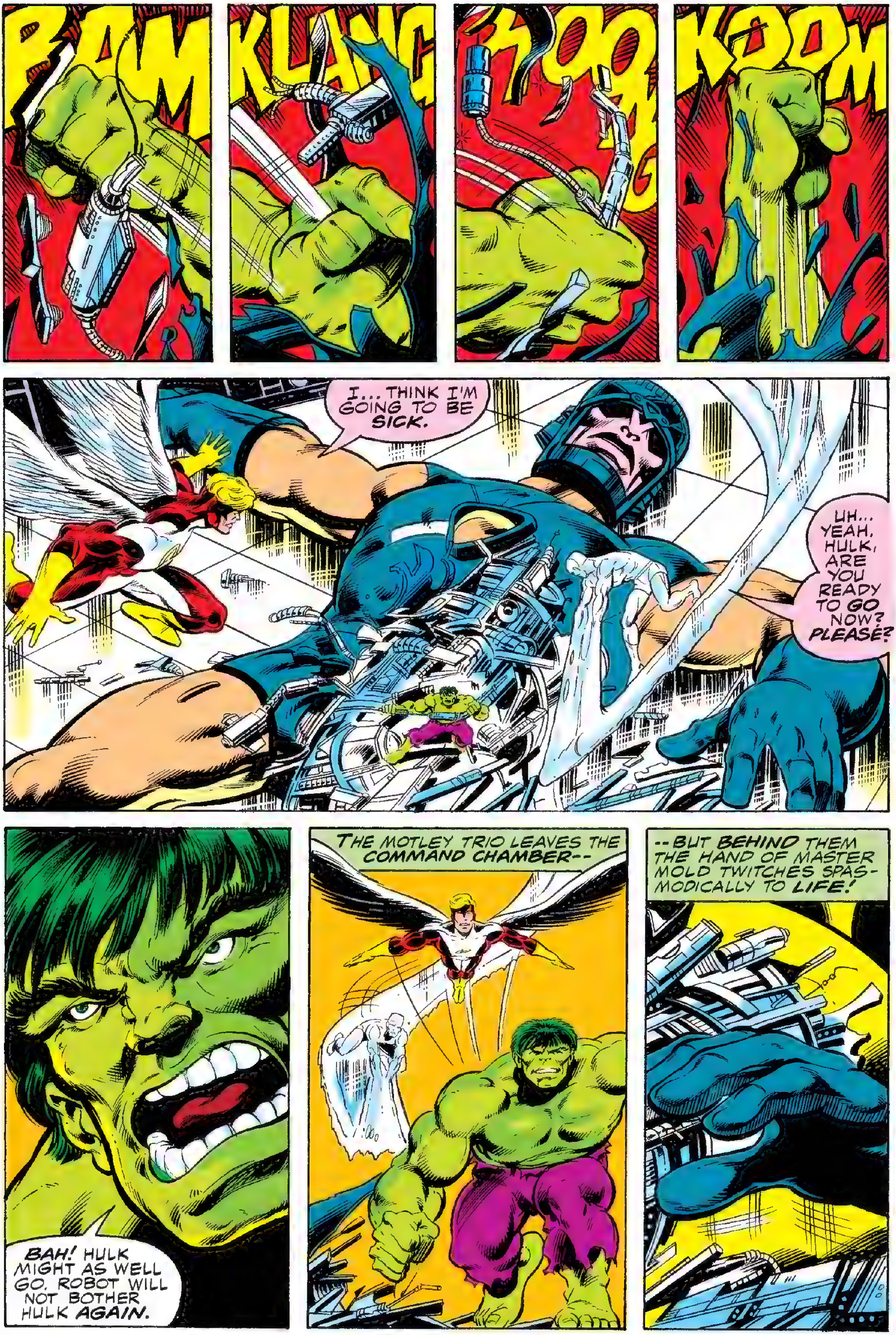

HE'LL HEAR--! HEY!
GET YOUR COLD HANDS OFF HULK, LITTLE MAN!
HULK TOLD YOU, HE DOESN'T CARE IF THE ROBOT HEARS HIM!
AND HULK DOESN'T NEED YOUR HELP TO FIGHT!
WHAT? WHO DARES TO ATTACK THE MASTER MOLD?
KRASH
THE HULK DARES, ROBOT!

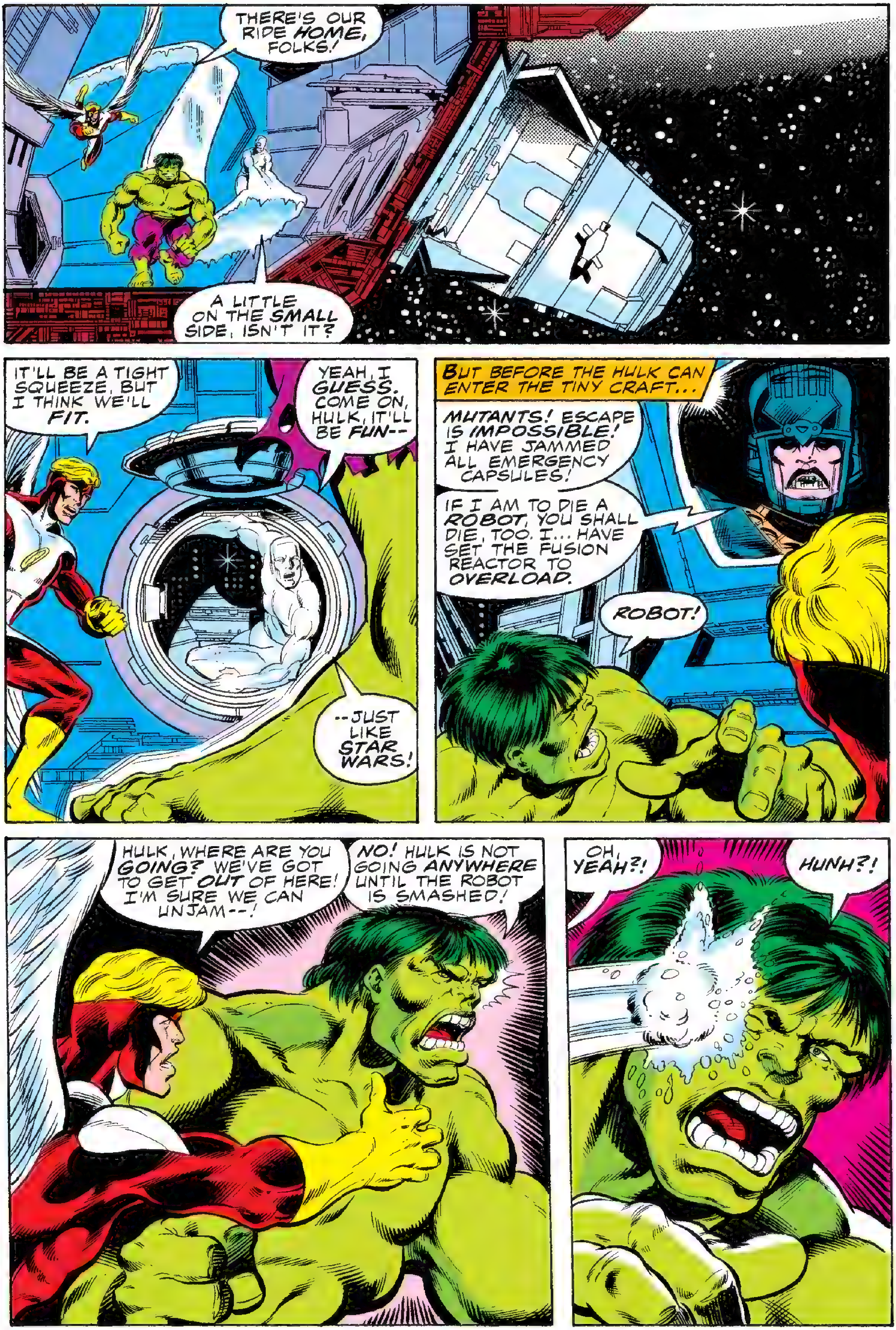

POOR, FOOLISH BRUTE! MERE STRENGTH IS NOT ENOUGH TO STOP THE MASTER MOLD!
NOT WHEN MY CONCUSSION BLAST CAN BLOW YOU AWAY, LIKE A THISTLE IN THE WIND.
HULK IS NO THISTLE.
AND A ROBOT CANNOT FIGHT... IF HE CANNOT STAND!!
NOW, ROBOT--YOU WILL LEARN THAT NOTHING IS STRONGER THAN THE HULK!

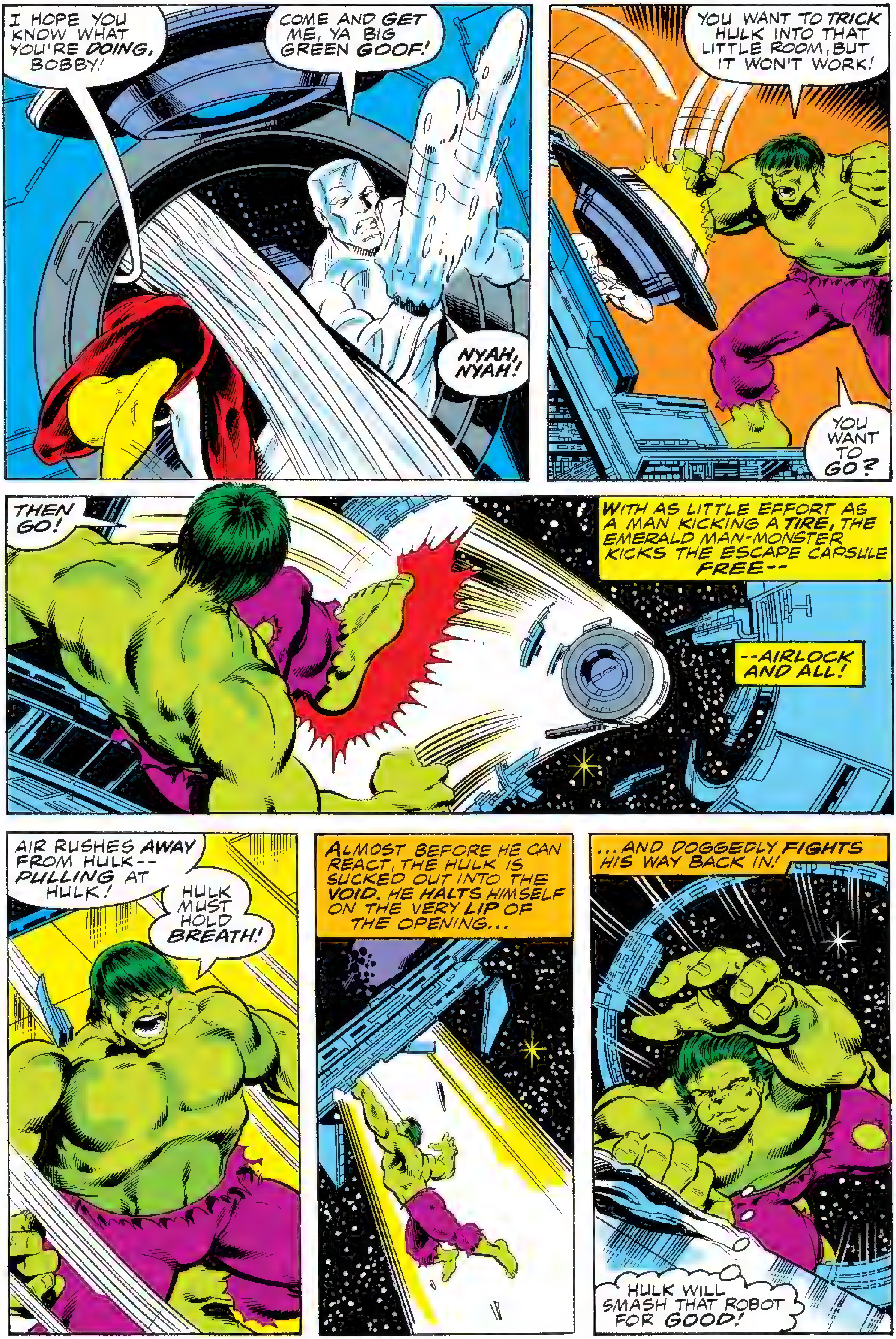

NOTHING!
ZZZAAPP
YOU HAVE TRIED MY PATIENCE WITH YOUR TALK OF STRENGTH, MONSTER! IT WILL DO YOU LITTLE GOOD AGAINST A MILLION VOLTS OF UNBRIDLED ENERGY!
REMARKABLE! I BELIEVE THAT HE IS STILL BREATHING!
ALL RIGHT, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? REAL SENTINELS DON'T LAUGH OR SHOW SURPRISE!
JUST WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU?
OH, I AM INDEED A SENTINEL NOW, DRAKE... THOUGH I WAS NOT ALWAYS SO.
BEFORE I DIED, I WAS A MAN... A MAN NAMED STEVEN LANG.
A

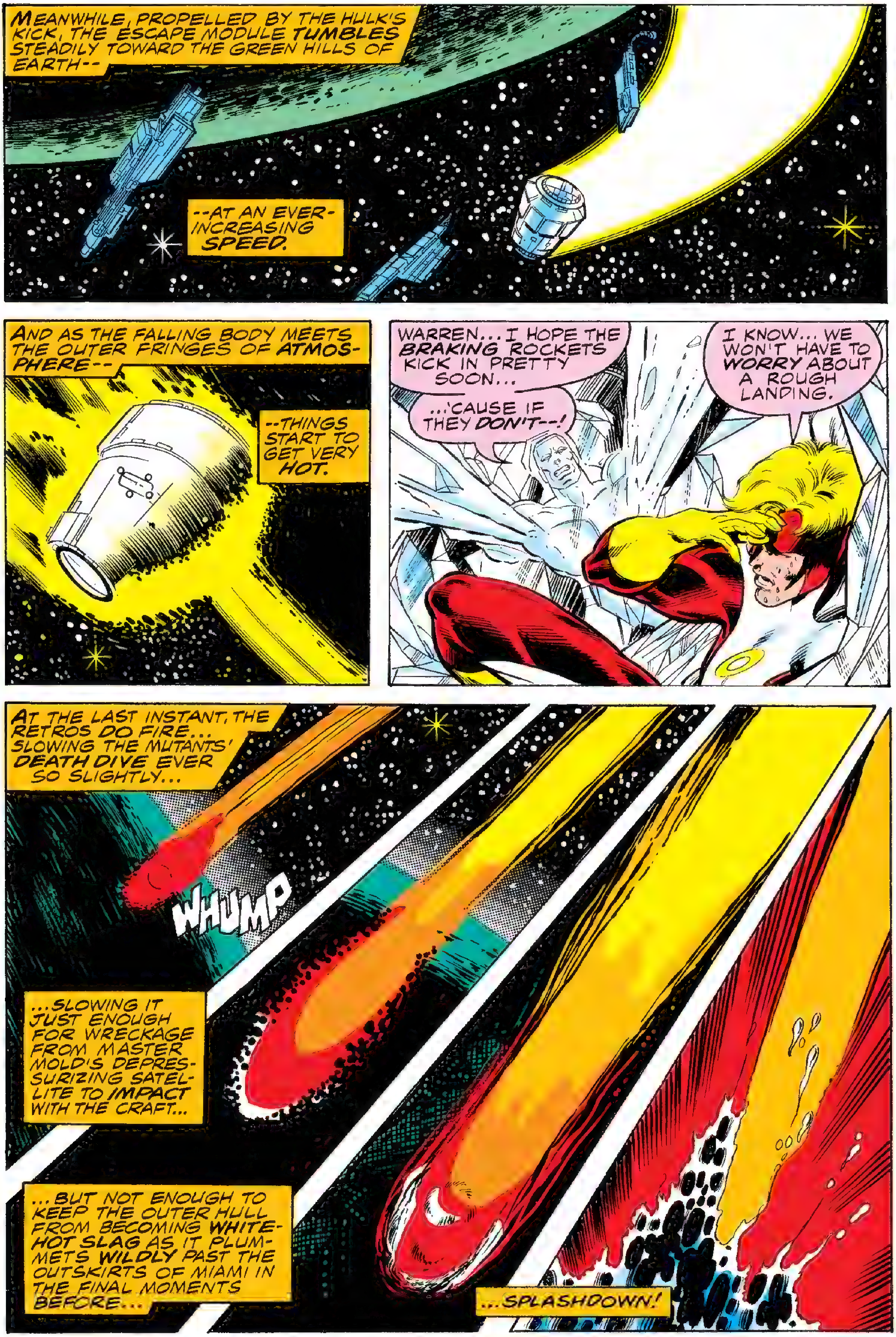

"I WAS THE HEAD OF PROJECT ARMAGEDDON, A GOVERNMENT STUDY OF MUTANTS--AND I WAS DEDICATED TO THEIR EXTERMINATION.
"AT LEAST, I WAS BEFORE I MET DEATH AT THE HANDS OF THE ACCURSED X-MEN!*
*X-MEN #100 --BOB.
"BUT THE CRASH OF MY FLYING GUNSHIP DID NOT KILL ME IMMEDIATELY. AS THE COWARDLY X-MEN FLED MY BURNING SHIELD SPACE PLATFORM--
"--I PULLED MYSELF FROM THE WRECKAGE AND CRAWLED TO THE CHAMBER WHICH HELD MY GREATEST WEAPON--
"--THE MASTER MOLD!
"IF I WAS TO DIE, ALL MUTANTKIND WOULD SUFFER FOR IT!
"BUT, AS WITH MY OTHER SENTINELS, THE MASTER MOLD'S CIRCUITRY DEVIATED TOO MUCH FROM BOLIVAR TRASK'S* ORIGINAL DESIGNS.
"I DID NOT MERELY ACTIVATE THE MASTER MOLD.
*TRASK BUILT THE FIRST SENTINELS. SEE X-MEN #14 --BOB.
"AS I BREATHED MY LAST, I BECAME THE MASTER MOLD!
BALONEY!
Eh?

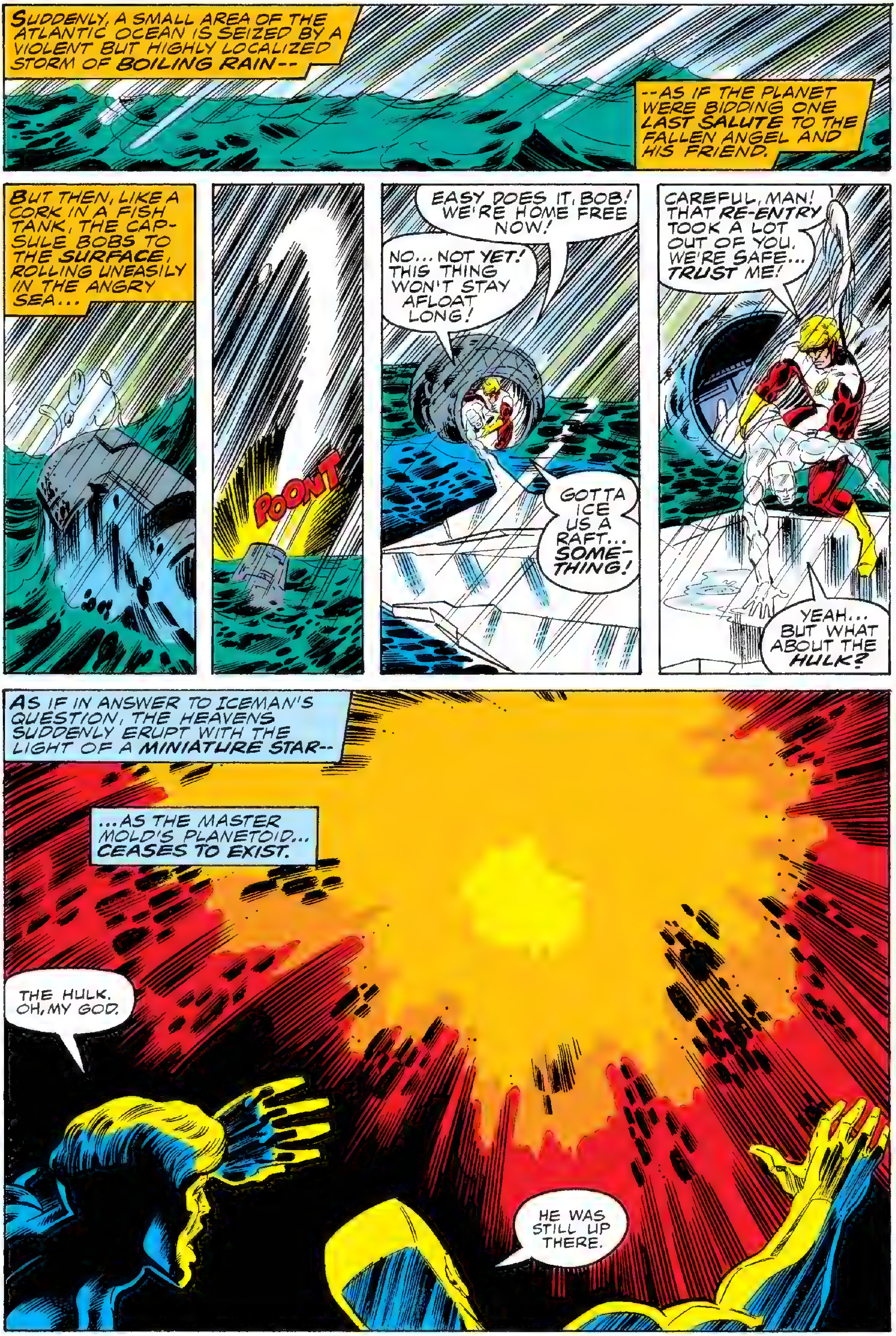

WHEN THE SHIELD BOYS RECLAIMED THEIR ORBITAL PLATFORM, THEY *FOUND* LANG.
HE'S STILL *ALIVE* IN A GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL--A *MINDLESS VEGETABLE!*
WHATEVER YOU MAY BE, YOU'RE *NOT* STEVEN LANG!
THAT... *CANNOT* BE!
MY *MIND*... MY *MEMORIES* ARE LANG'S! I *MUST* BE HIM! I *MUST!*
THE HULK DOESN'T CARE *WHO* YOU ARE, ROBOT!
THAKOOM
HULK WILL **SMASH** YOU JUST THE SAME!

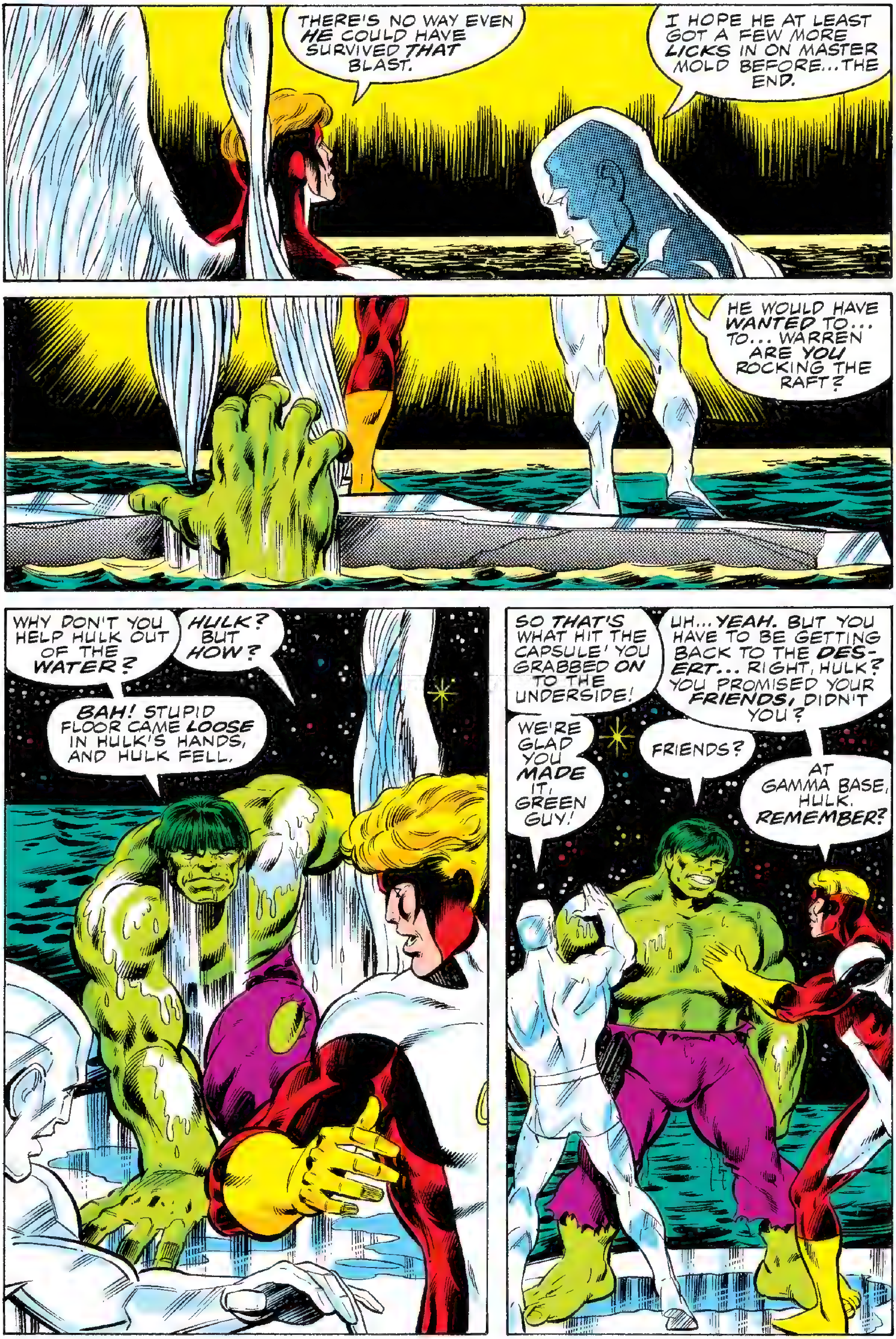

BAM
KLANG
SPOONG
KOOM
I... THINK I'M GOING TO BE **SICK.**
UH... YEAH, HULK, ARE YOU READY TO **GO** NOW? **PLEASE?**
BAH! HULK MIGHT AS WELL GO. ROBOT WILL NOT BOTHER HULK **AGAIN.**
THE MOTLEY TRIO LEAVES THE **COMMAND CHAMBER**--
--BUT **BEHIND** THEM THE HAND OF MASTER MOLD TWITCHES SPASMODICALLY TO **LIFE!**

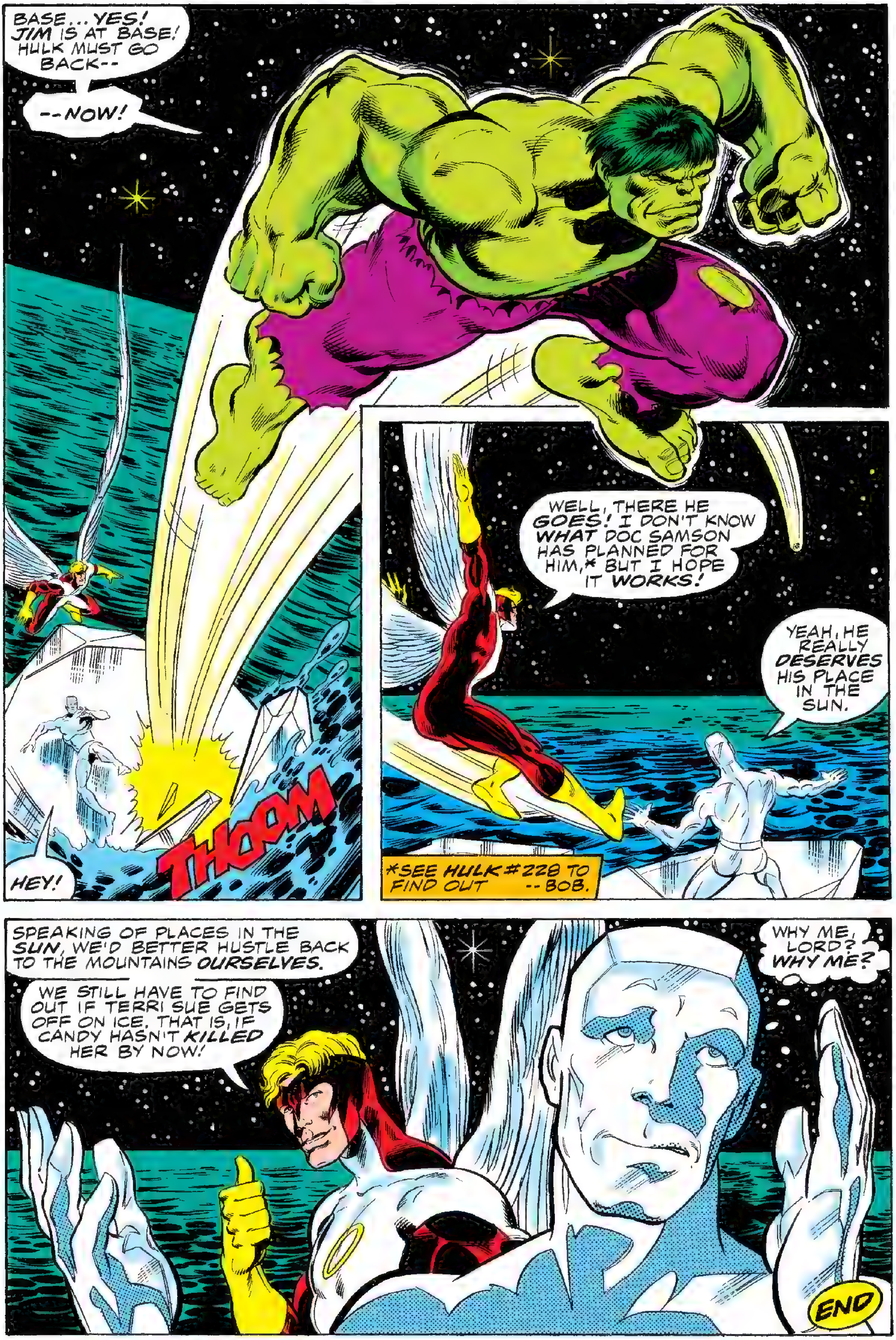

THERE'S OUR RIDE *HOME*, FOLKS!
A LITTLE ON THE *SMALL* SIDE, ISN'T IT?
IT'LL BE A TIGHT SQUEEZE, BUT I THINK WE'LL *FIT*.
YEAH, I *GUESS*. COME ON, HULK, IT'LL BE *FUN*--
--JUST LIKE *STAR WARS*!
BUT BEFORE THE HULK CAN ENTER THE TINY CRAFT...
MUTANTS! ESCAPE IS *IMPOSSIBLE!* I HAVE JAMMED ALL EMERGENCY CAPSULES!
IF I AM TO DIE A *ROBOT*, YOU SHALL DIE, TOO. I... HAVE SET THE FUSION REACTOR TO *OVERLOAD*.
ROBOT!
HULK, WHERE ARE YOU *GOING?* WE'VE GOT TO GET *OUT* OF HERE! I'M SURE WE CAN UNJAM--!
NO! HULK IS NOT GOING *ANYWHERE* UNTIL THE ROBOT IS SMASHED!
OH, *YEAH?!*
HUNH?!


I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, BOBBY!
COME AND GET ME, YA BIG GREEN GOOF!
NYAH, NYAH!
YOU WANT TO TRICK HULK INTO THAT LITTLE ROOM, BUT IT WON'T WORK!
YOU WANT TO GO?
THEN GO!
WITH AS LITTLE EFFORT AS A MAN KICKING A TIRE, THE EMERALD MAN-MONSTER KICKS THE ESCAPE CAPSULE FREE--
--AIRLOCK AND ALL!
AIR RUSHES AWAY FROM HULK-- PULLING AT HULK!
HULK MUST HOLD BREATH!
ALMOST BEFORE HE CAN REACT, THE HULK IS SUCKED OUT INTO THE VOID. HE HALTS HIMSELF ON THE VERY LIP OF THE OPENING...
...AND DOGGEDLY FIGHTS HIS WAY BACK IN!
HULK WILL SMASH THAT ROBOT FOR GOOD!


MEANWHILE, PROPELLED BY THE HULK'S KICK, THE ESCAPE MODULE TUMBLES STEADILY TOWARD THE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH--
--AT AN EVER-INCREASING SPEED.
AND AS THE FALLING BODY MEETS THE OUTER FRINGES OF ATMOSPHERE--
--THINGS START TO GET VERY HOT.
WARREN... I HOPE THE BRAKING ROCKETS KICK IN PRETTY SOON...
...'CAUSE IF THEY DON'T--!
I KNOW... WE WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A ROUGH LANDING.
AT THE LAST INSTANT, THE RETROS DO FIRE... SLOWING THE MUTANTS' DEATH DIVE EVER SO SLIGHTLY...
WHUMP
...SLOWING IT JUST ENOUGH FOR WRECKAGE FROM MASTER MOLD'S DEPRESSURIZING SATELLITE TO IMPACT WITH THE CRAFT...
...BUT NOT ENOUGH TO KEEP THE OUTER HULL FROM BECOMING WHITE-HOT SLAG AS IT PLUMMETS WILDLY PAST THE OUTSKIRTS OF MIAMI IN THE FINAL MOMENTS BEFORE...
...SPLASHDOWN!


SUDDENLY, A SMALL AREA OF THE ATLANTIC OCEAN IS SEIZED BY A VIOLENT BUT HIGHLY LOCALIZED STORM OF BOILING RAIN--
--AS IF THE PLANET WERE BIDDING ONE LAST SALUTE TO THE FALLEN ANGEL AND HIS FRIEND.
BUT THEN, LIKE A CORK IN A FISH TANK, THE CAPSULE BOBS TO THE SURFACE, ROLLING UNEASILY IN THE ANGRY SEA...
POONT
EASY DOES IT, BOB! WE'RE HOME FREE NOW!
NO... NOT YET! THIS THING WON'T STAY AFLOAT LONG!
GOTTA ICE US A RAFT... SOMETHING!
CAREFUL, MAN! THAT RE-ENTRY TOOK A LOT OUT OF YOU. WE'RE SAFE... TRUST ME!
YEAH... BUT WHAT ABOUT THE HULK?
AS IF IN ANSWER TO ICEMAN'S QUESTION, THE HEAVENS SUDDENLY ERUPT WITH THE LIGHT OF A MINIATURE STAR--
...AS THE MASTER MOLD'S PLANETOID... CEASES TO EXIST.
THE HULK. OH, MY GOD.
HE WAS STILL UP THERE.


THERE'S NO WAY EVEN *HE* COULD HAVE SURVIVED *THAT* BLAST.
I HOPE HE AT LEAST GOT A FEW MORE *LICKS* IN ON MASTER MOLD BEFORE... THE END.
HE WOULD HAVE *WANTED* TO... TO... WARREN ARE *YOU* ROCKING THE RAFT?
WHY DON'T YOU HELP HULK OUT OF THE *WATER*?
HULK? BUT *HOW?*
BAH! STUPID FLOOR CAME *LOOSE* IN HULK'S HANDS, AND HULK FELL.
SO *THAT'S* WHAT HIT THE CAPSULE! YOU GRABBED *ON* TO THE UNDERSIDE!
UH... *YEAH.* BUT YOU HAVE TO BE GETTING BACK TO THE *DESERT*... RIGHT, HULK? YOU PROMISED YOUR *FRIENDS*, DIDN'T YOU?
WE'RE GLAD YOU *MADE* IT, GREEN GUY!
FRIENDS?
AT GAMMA BASE, HULK. *REMEMBER?*


BASE... YES! JIM IS AT BASE! HULK MUST GO BACK--
--NOW!
HEY!
THOOM
WELL, THERE HE GOES! I DON'T KNOW WHAT DOC SAMSON HAS PLANNED FOR HIM,* BUT I HOPE IT WORKS!
YEAH, HE REALLY DESERVES HIS PLACE IN THE SUN.
*SEE HULK #228 TO FIND OUT --BOB.
SPEAKING OF PLACES IN THE SUN, WE'D BETTER HUSTLE BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS OURSELVES.
WE STILL HAVE TO FIND OUT IF TERRI SUE GETS OFF ON ICE. THAT IS, IF CANDY HASN'T KILLED HER BY NOW!
WHY ME, LORD? WHY ME?
END

THEY WERE THE CHAMPIONS, MY FRIEND!

BY TONY ISABELLA

In 1967, independent moviemaker Larry Buchanan proclaimed "Mars Needs Women!" for a flick starring Tommy Kirk and Yvonne Craig that never actually made it into theaters but was instead syndicated to television. In the mid-1970s, the overlords of Marvel Comics, who, though I never met them, I always assumed had a "Business Hydra" dress code, proclaimed to then-editors Len Wein and Marv Wolfman that "Marvel Needs Books!"

So began a week where poor Len and Marv held meetings with Marvel writers to create the new books demanded by said overlords. I was one of those writers and pitched three titles: *Black Goliath* [who I wanted to call "Giant-Man," but that's another story], *Tigra* and *The Champions*. All three were given the green light. Of course, in typical madcap Marvel manner, when I came into the office the very next day, production manager John Verpoorten told me I was already weeks behind on all three titles. Excelsior?

The Champions concept I pitched to my friends Len and Marv was not what readers would see a few months later. My original pitch was a title starring just Iceman and the Angel. I wanted to do a mash-up of *Route 66* and *The Odd Couple*. Two young heroes traveling across the country having adventures and helping people. I figured many of those people should be beautiful young women because...do I really need to explain that?

I wanted to write a buddy book, an idea that predated *Power Man and Iron Fist*. I wanted to find a use for Iceman and the Angel because they had just quit the X-Men and I hated seeing any of my favorite Marvel heroes on the sidelines. [Did I mention Bill "Black Goliath" Foster and Greer "Tigra" Nelson?] I wanted to send some cool Marvel action to those parts of the country that didn't figure in many of our comics. I also thought I could write funny dialogue between the incredibly wealthy Warren Worthington and the roughly middle-class Bobby Drake. Great idea for a comic, right?

My original Champions concept survived about ten seconds, undone by Len saying all super-hero teams must have five members. I thought he was putting me on, given he'd both written and edited *Fantastic Four*. Our conversation went like this:

TONY: You mean like the Fantastic FOUR?

LEN: Exactly.

This initial "rule" was followed by others. Every team must have a strong man. Every team must have a woman. Every team must have one member who has his own book. Len stopped short of telling me every team must have a mystery-solving dog. Small favors.

In all fairness to my pals, they had to deal with the Hydra suits. I didn't. I would not have lasted a day in their jobs.

Once I realized Len and Marv were serious about this, I requested Hercules and the Black Widow. Hercules would be fun to write and, having written the Widow out of *Daredevil*, I thought I could give her a leader's role in this new team. Turning down Len's suggestion of Luke Cage for the fifth member - I wanted the team to be based in Los Angeles and Cage is New York City through and through - I went with Ghost Rider.

Marvel had its new super-team. Now all I had to do was figure out how to bring these characters together and give their team a reason to exist.

I used up a year's allotment of coincidence by getting the heroes to the UCLA campus just when some disgruntled gods put the grab on Hercules and guest-star Venus. I threw in every Marvel mythological menace I could think of and relied heavily on the artistic genius of pencilers Don Heck and George Tuska to make my convoluted, plot-heavy trilogy work. When you read those three issues here, you'll understand my reverence for those gentlemen.

I moved back to my native Cleveland during these opening issues of the title, drawn back home by Barb Kepke [the future Mrs. Isabella] and my growing dislike of New York City. The move was complicated. Bill Mantlo scripted *Champions* #3 from my panel-by-panel plot while Chris Claremont plotted and scripted issue #4. I was cool with the assignments. After all, I was the editor who first hired production guy Bill as a writer and had hired Chris as my assistant editor on Marvel's black-and-white magazines of the era.

When I got back in the *Champions* saddle, I wanted to establish the team as super-heroes for the common man. They would be getting a too ostentatious skyscraper headquarters, paid for by the very deep pockets of the Angel. When Iceman got a gander at his pal's worth, he gasped "...that's more money than God makes!"

Ivan Petrovich, the Widow's faithful aide-de-camp, was skeptical of this venture. But Natasha felt a connection with her new teammates. They were loners, none of them comfortable in their lives to date. She could relate to them. The scene where she explains this to Ivan is a favorite of mine.

The new team's first challenge was Stuart Clarke, a super-scientist with terrible business sense who blamed competition with Tony Stark and the then-current recession for the failure of his company. He donned a suit of armor and started robbing banks. Not the deepest of thinkers, the man the authorities would name "Rampage" convinced himself no real people would be hurt by his crimes, only the banks and the government that would make up the bank's losses.

Issue #5 introduced Emerson Bale, a high-priced lawyer representing the Worthington family and the Champions. Picture the foolish Tony Isabella of 1976 thinking he was so clever with that name. Picture fans realizing immediately that a guy named "Bale" was probably up to no good. Sigh.

Issue #5 established Iceman was already thinking about leaving the team. Concerned about his secret identity and the effect losing it would have on his folks, he wanted to stay just long enough to help Warren get the team up and running. This would be a continuing sub-plot after I left the book.

Issue #5 also hinted at another development in Iceman's life. His powers were getting stronger. Two unsuspecting women felt a sudden chill as Bobby passed them on a sidewalk. I could get drama out of him wanting to leave the Champions but having to stay because his powers were becoming dangerous.

The conclusion of the story saw the Widow become the team's leader. It has one of the most cynical endings I ever wrote. It doubtless speaks volumes about my low character that, on rereading the issue for this intro, I chuckled evilly at those final panels.

"The Man Who Created the Black Widow" [*Champions* #7] was to be the first chapter of my super-hero Russian tragedy. Instead, it turned out to be my final issue as I moved on to other challenges at other publishers. Mantlo would come onboard with #8 and make the book his own.

Issue #7 introduced three new characters, two of whom had a history with Ivan and the Widow. Commissar Bruskin was the man who trained the Widow in her younger years. You'll learn about Yuri Petrovitch when you read issues #8-10. As for Darkstar, she was a cool Russian chick with black-light powers that were basically the equivalent of Green Lantern's power-ring powers over at DC Comics. I came up with her and artist George Tuska designed her, but Mantlo did the heavy lifting, giving her an intriguing personality, a doomed romance and more than a little mystery.

Here's what you know. Yuri was the long-believed-dead son of Ivan. He put together a team of villains to get revenge on the father he believed abandoned him.

Here's what you don't know because the story I originally intended was even more tragic than what Bill devised. Yuri also hated his sister...Natasha.

My inspiration for this was a flashback in an earlier Widow story in which Ivan rescued young Natasha from a fire which claimed the life of her mother. It was a tragic moment. I wanted to make it more so.

During the arc, we and the Widow would learn Yuri was her brother and Ivan her father. Having arrived too late to save the lives of his wife and - he thought - his son, Ivan considered himself to be unworthy to claim his daughter's love. Though he'd remain as close to her as possible, as her chauffeur and confidant, he would never reveal their true relationship.

Determined to punish the father he falsely believed had abandoned him, Yuri intended to kill Natasha in front of Ivan. To save her, Ivan would reveal the truth he had hidden for so long. This would wound Natasha, enrage Yuri, and leave Ivan more alone than ever. I don't recall if Yuri or Ivan survive my story. I'm an old softy, but I know you can't have a great Russian tragedy unless something, uh, tragic happens.

New writer Mantlo hit the ground running. The last panel of issue #7 was changed to replace the Orb, a Ghost Rider villain, with the Titanium Man. Bill had an affinity for Russian characters and that served the next three issues well. Bob Hall came on as penciler of those issues with inking by Bruce Patterson, Bob Layton and Frank Giacoia. Young artists would dominate the rest of the Champions' 17-issue run with occasional appearances by veterans like Giacoia, Mike Esposito and, in an issue inked by John Byrne, George Tuska.

During the "Yuri Petrovitch" arc, a rift developed between Hercules and the Ghost Rider with Herc questioning if Johnny Blaze's demonic persona was truly on the side of the angels, or even, *the* Angel. Bobby was still planning to leave, disappointed by the Champions' inability to fulfill their "heroes for the common man" mission. Trying to live up to that ideal, the Iceman would visit the badly-injured Stuart Clarke in the hospital.

He was determined to do what he could to help even villainous unfortunates. The Black Widow's leadership was more or less "championed" by her teammates, but she would find it difficult at times to wrangle such an unruly grouping of heroes. From time to time, the Angel would bristle at taking her orders, though he'd been the one who appointed her to the position of team leader. It was a nice mix of super-heroics and human drama, a mix at which Mantlo excelled.

Mantlo had a passion for Marvel's existing heroes and villains. His next three issues featured Black Goliath, Hawkeye, an out-of-his-own-time Two-Gun Kid, Warlord Kaa, Kamo Tharn, the Stranger and Stilt-Man. For #14 and #15, he and artist John Byrne created one of my favorite Marvel villains of the 1970s...Swarm.

At a time when the newspapers were filled with reports of African killer bees on the attack and Arthur Herzog's thrilling novel *The Swarm* was being adapted into a not-so-thrilling big-budget movie, Bill and John gave us a Nazi scientist who had a close and personal relationship with bees. If I had to pick the best Champions story, it would be "The Creature Called...Swarm!"

The personal conflicts would continue. Darkstar would join the team and her presence would make Iceman reconsider his plan to move on. Ghost Rider trusted Darkstar as little as Hercules trusted him and was being uncharacteristically chauvinistic around the Black Widow. The Angel wasn't getting along with the others, distracted because his expensive headquarters was falling apart around them. Natasha was having second thoughts, especially after Ivan decided to return to Russia. The Champions was a cobbled-together family in serious need of counseling.

The Champions would guest-star in an *Iron Man Annual* and an issue of *Avengers*. The former was written by Mantlo and drawn by Tuska. The latter was written by Jim Shooter with art by Tuska and inker Pablo Marcos. I suspect the *Avengers* story was one of the three-in-one fill-ins assigned by editor-in-chief Marv Wolfman. It could've run in *Avengers*, *Champions* or *Iron Man*.

In *Super-Villain Team-Up*, Doctor Doom was conquering the world by controlling the minds of all humans. An uneasy alliance of Magneto and the Beast was all that stood against total doom-ination. That story started in *SVTU* and concluded in *Champions* #16.

The Champions were appearing all over the Marvel Universe, but it wasn't enough to keep the bickering outsiders together. Issue #17 would be the title's swan song. Though the final page of that final issue announced the story would conclude in an upcoming *Avengers*, even that closure was denied to the Angel and his team.

Three months later, in *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #17, Peter Parker would travel to Los Angeles to take photos of the break-up of the Champions. Apparently, the team had sent out a press release, which would make this event the equivalent of a super-hero divorce party. However, by the time Peter got to Champions Tower, all the heroes except for the Angel had already left, Iceman was missing and the building was falling apart even faster than previously. It was an embarrassingly sad ending for the team, but a very spiffy two-issue story by Mantlo, penciler Sal Buscema and inker Dave Hunt.

The only good thing that came from the ending of the Champions was Bobby and Warren patching up their friendship. Six months later, in *Incredible Hulk Annual* #7, Bobby was vacationing at Warren's swanky desert pad. Lots of sun, bikini-clad babes, the Hulk and the Master Mold of the Sentinels. It took until after the Champions had ended for Marvel to publish something sort of like my original concept. Go figure.

It's been four decades since I wrote *Champions* #1. When I'm asked to autograph comics at conventions, I always end up signing several issues of the title. The owners of those comic books always tell me how much they enjoy the Champions. On that level, the title was a success.

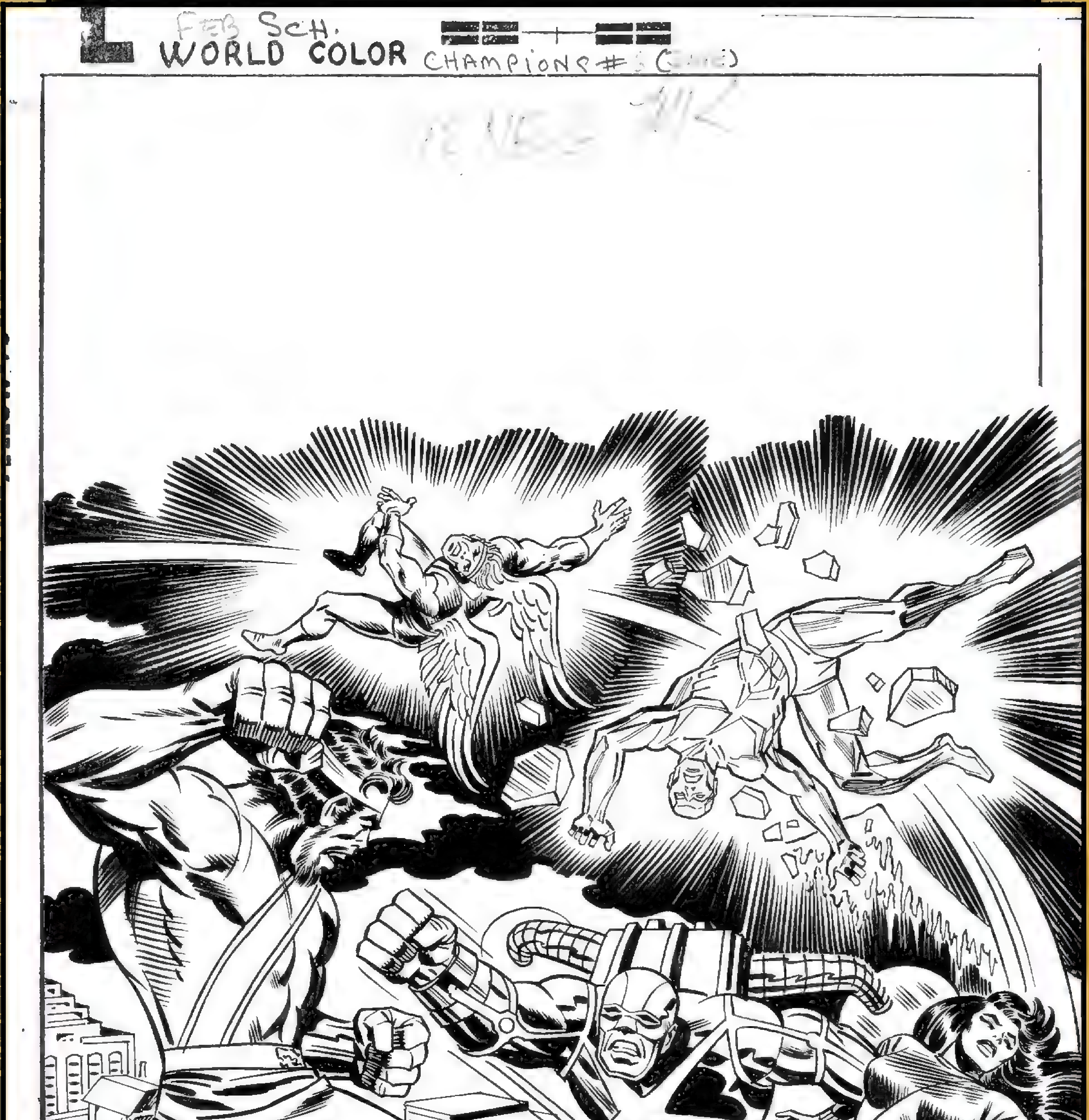
Today's Marvel is no stranger to odd super-hero teams. Then again, Marvel was never adverse to the odd. Stan Lee replaced the founding members of the Avengers with three reformed villains. The various modern-day configurations of the Avengers and the X-Men have always contained some surprising members. The Defenders series that will air on Netflix in a couple years will be vastly different from any of the versions of the team that have appeared in Marvel's comics, and the Defenders had its share of crazy-but-wonderful rosters as well. It's what Marvel does.

Diversity has been a key Marvel Universe element for a long time. Maybe there's a lesson for the real world in those comics. Maybe we can all get along.

Tony Isabella

Medina, Ohio
August 19, 2015

Tony Isabella is a 43-year veteran of the comics industry. He has written and edited for several publishers while publishing close to 10,000 articles and columns on comics. He has also worked in comics retailing, distribution and promotion. He is the creator of Black Lightning at DC Comics and the co-creator of Marvel's Misty Knight and Tigra. He enjoys comics of all kinds every day as part of his balanced mental diet and recommends you do the same.


FEB SCH.
WORLD COLOR
CHAMPIONS #6 (COVER)
Jack Kirby

Champions #6 cover art by **JACK KIRBY & FRANK GIACOIA**

Courtesy of HeritageAuctions.com

6
11
AND, WHEN HE REACHES THE STREET, RAMPAGE'S REASONING PROVES TO BE CORRECT.
YET EVEN WERE HE GARBED IN FULL BATTLE REGALIA, THE CHAMPIONS WOULD SCARCE NOTICE HIM...
...IN THEIR CONCERN OVER THE FALLEN IVAN.
MANY SEE IVAN AS MERELY THE BLACK WIDOW'S DRIVER, BUT METHINKS THE BOND BETWIXT THEM FAR STRONGER.
THAT'S HOW I READ IT, TOO, HERK.
YOU'VE GOT TO SAVE HIM, DOCTOR!
ADD "NO MATTER WHAT THE EXPENSE", WIDOW.
THE CHAMPIONS TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN.
HMM...LOOKS LIKE LOS ANGELES HAS HERSELF A NOW--BACKED BY THE WORTHINGTON FORTUNE, NO LESS.
WE'LL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN, MADAME ROMANOFF. I CAN'T MINIMIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS INJURY, THOUGH.
BUT HE IS ALIVE AND HE IS A FIGHTER.
BEYOND THAT, IT'S IN THE HANDS OF GOD.
OFFICE: WIDOW LOOKS TOO GIRLISH AGAIN -- Tony
I DON'T KNOW WHO THAT ARMORED SCUM WAS, BUT I'LL TRACK HIM DOWN FOR THIS!
AND IF IVAN DIES--
--THE WORLD WILL LEARN JUST HOW DEADLY THE BLACK WIDOW CAN BE!
WHAT GOOD WILL THAT DO IVAN, LADY?
WE'LL GET THAT CHARACTER--DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT. --BUT WE'LL GET HIM TO MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T HURT ANYBODY ELSE!
WE'RE THE CHAMPIONS --NOT THE AVENGERS!
11

Champions #6, page 7 art by **GEORGE TUSKA & VINCE COLLETTA**

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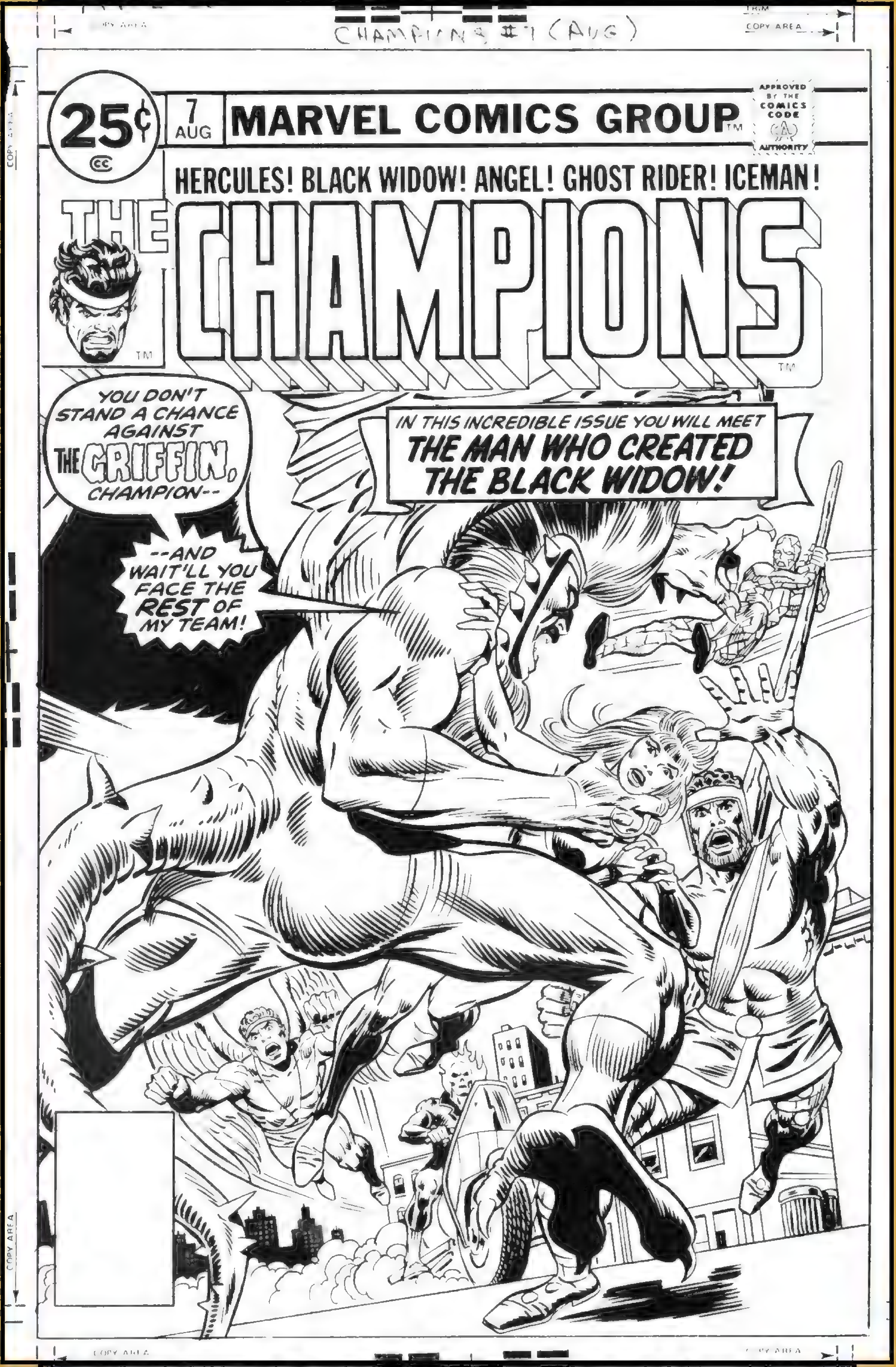
CHAMPIONS #7 (AUG)
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HERCULES! BLACK WIDOW! ANGEL! GHOST RIDER! ICEMAN!
THE CHAMPIONS
YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE GRIFFIN, CHAMPION--
IN THIS INCREDIBLE ISSUE YOU WILL MEET THE MAN WHO CREATED THE BLACK WIDOW!
--AND WAIT'LL YOU FACE THE REST OF MY TEAM!

Champions #7 original unedited cover art by **RICH BUCKLER**. For the final cover, Iceman was redrawn, Angel's face was tweaked and Ghost Rider's motorcycle was corrected.

COPY AREA
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THE CHAMPIONS™
GUEST STARRING BLACK GOLIATH!*
KANE & LAYTON
*PROVIDING HE LIVES THAT LONG!
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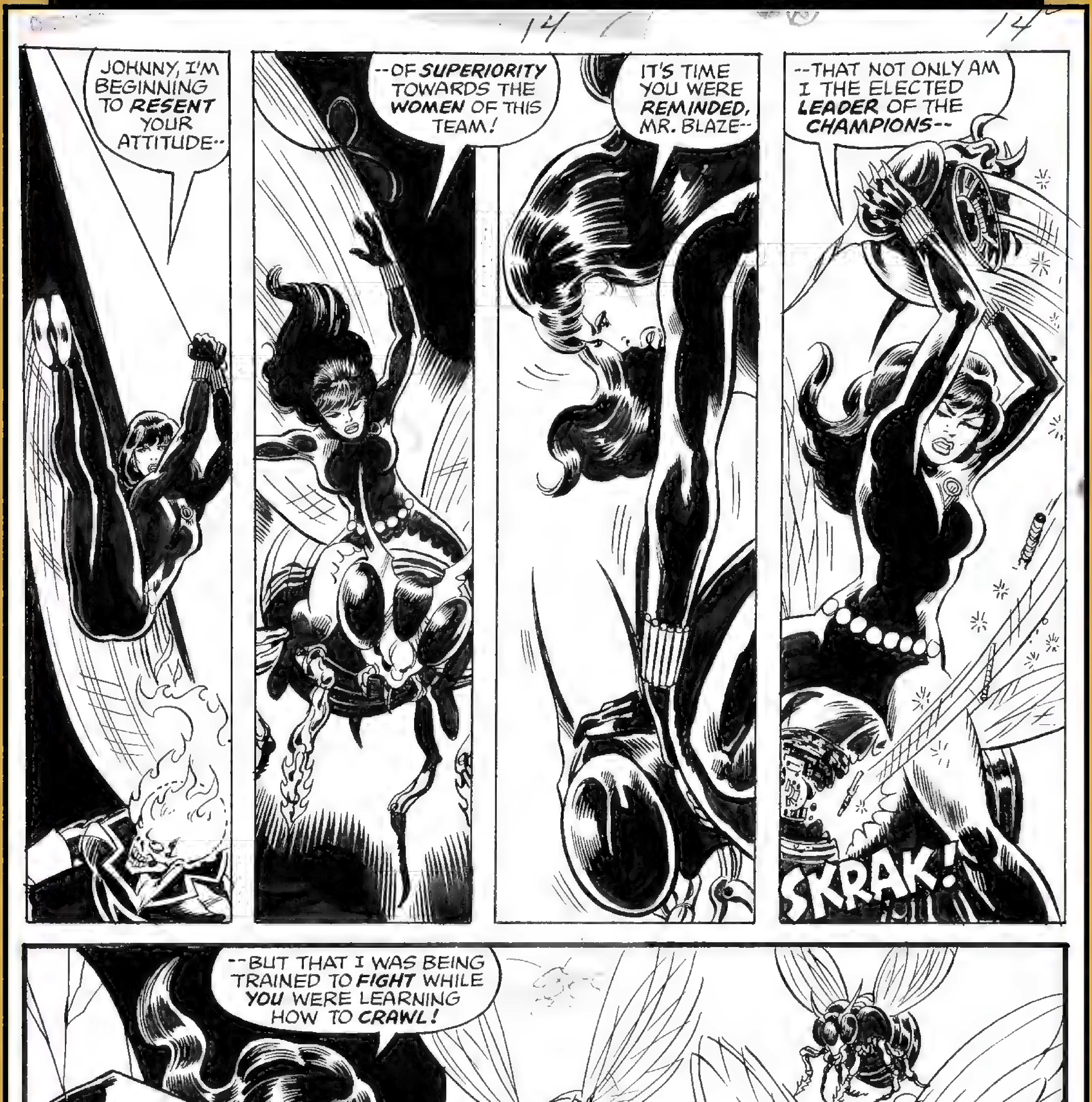
Champions #11 original unedited cover art by **GIL KANE & BOB LAYTON**. For the final cover, Black Goliath's face was redrawn to show greater surprise.


14
14
JOHNNY, I'M BEGINNING TO **RESENT** YOUR ATTITUDE--
--OF **SUPERIORITY** TOWARDS THE **WOMEN** OF THIS TEAM!
IT'S TIME YOU WERE **REMINDED,** MR. BLAZE--
--THAT NOT ONLY AM I THE ELECTED **LEADER** OF THE **CHAMPIONS**--
SKRAK!
--BUT THAT I WAS BEING TRAINED TO **FIGHT** WHILE **YOU** WERE LEARNING HOW TO **CRAWL!**
ONE MECHANICAL BEE DOES NOT A **SWARM** MAKE--

Champions #14, page 8 art by **JOHN BYRNE & MIKE ESPOSITO**

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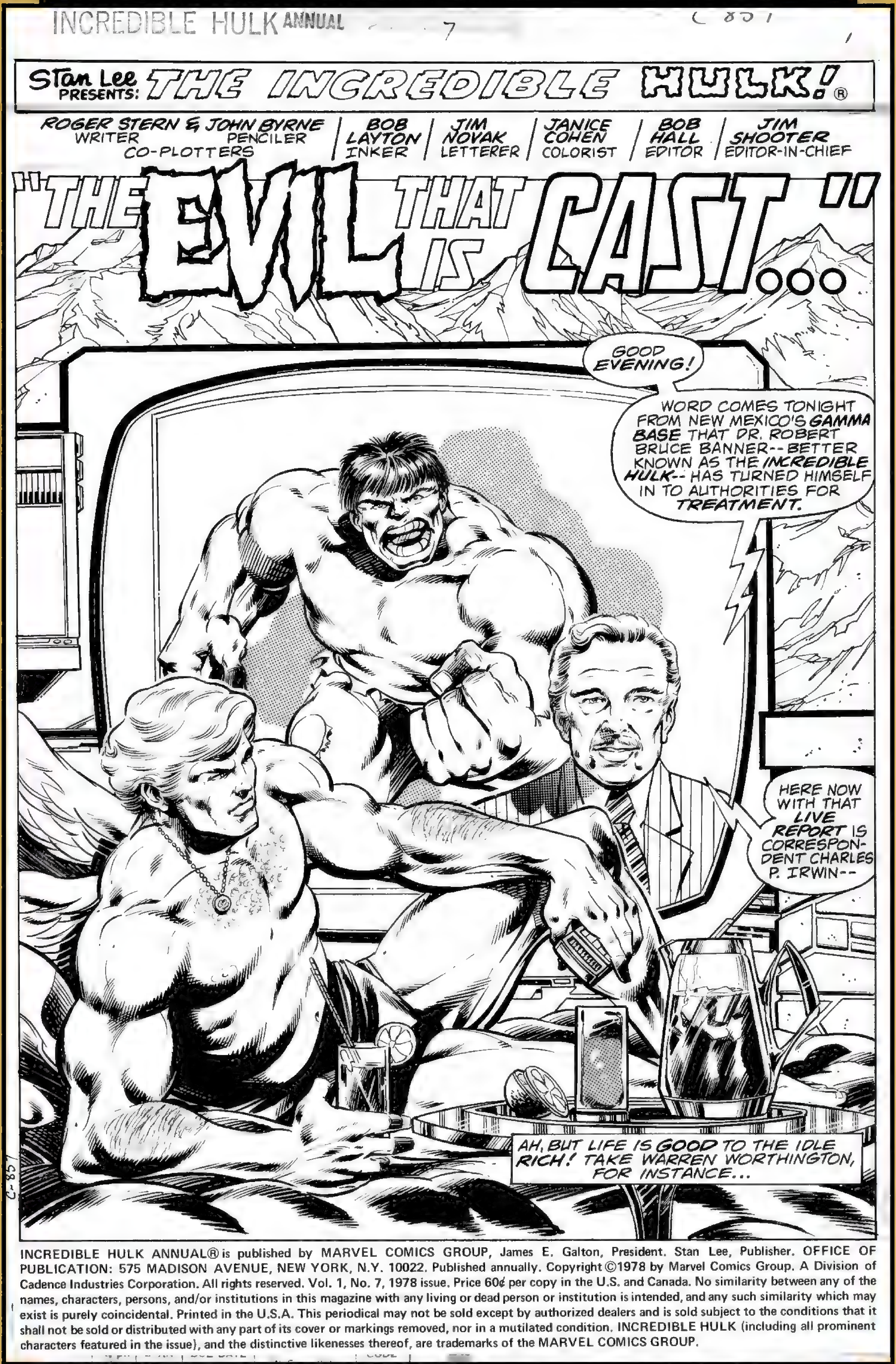
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1
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BOB HALL EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
"THE EVIL THAT IS CAST..."
GOOD EVENING!
WORD COMES TONIGHT FROM NEW MEXICO'S GAMMA BASE THAT DR. ROBERT BRUCE BANNER--BETTER KNOWN AS THE INCREDIBLE HULK--HAS TURNED HIMSELF IN TO AUTHORITIES FOR TREATMENT.
HERE NOW WITH THAT LIVE REPORT IS CORRESPONDENT CHARLES P. IRWIN--
AH, BUT LIFE IS GOOD TO THE IDLE RICH! TAKE WARREN WORTHINGTON, FOR INSTANCE...
C-85

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Incredible Hulk Annual #7, page 1 art by **JOHN BYRNE & BOB LAYTON**

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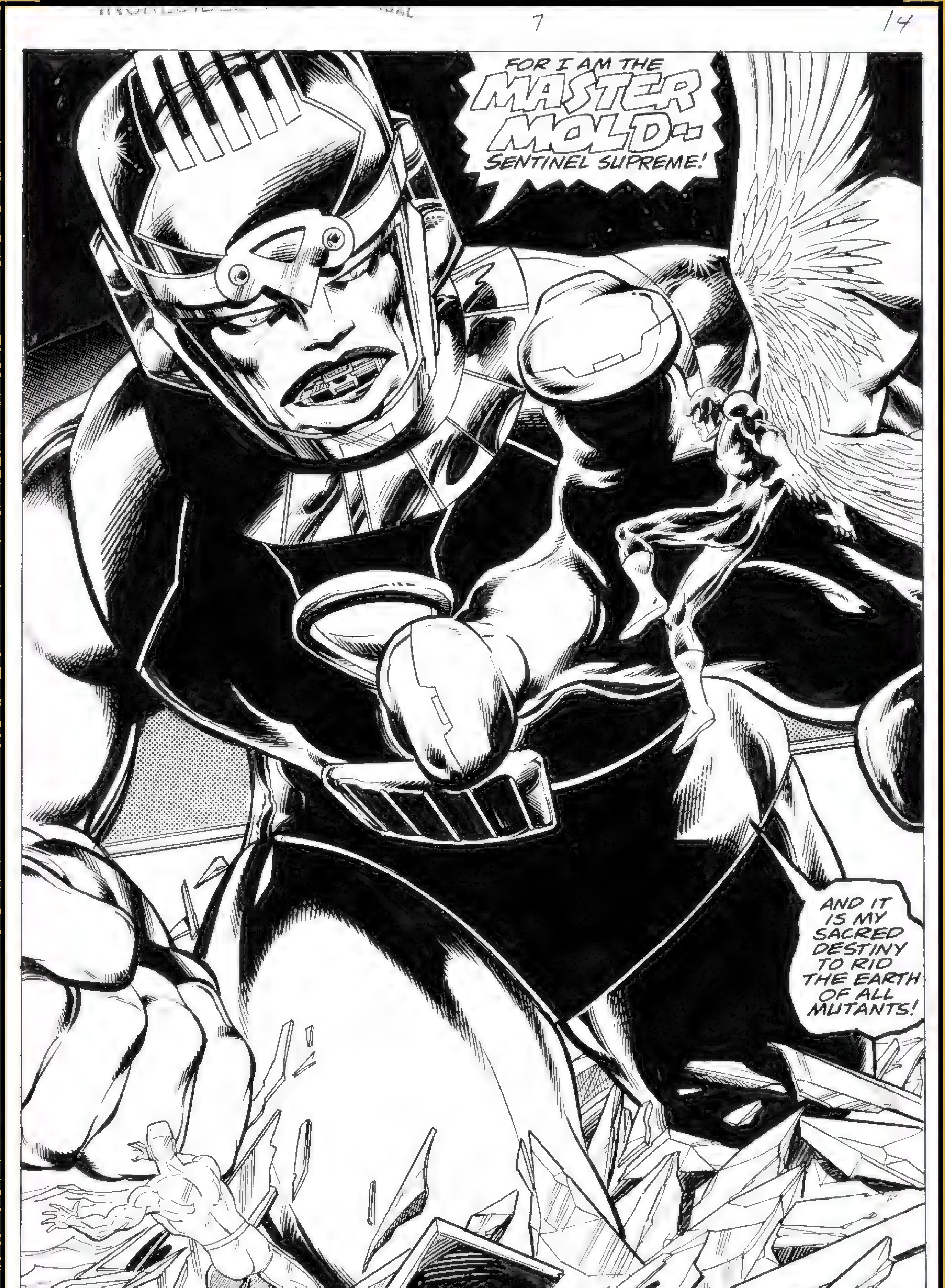
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14
FOR I AM THE MASTER MOLD-- SENTINEL SUPREME!
AND IT IS MY SACRED DESTINY TO RID THE EARTH OF ALL MUTANTS!
14

Incredible Hulk Annual #7, page 10 art by **JOHN BYRNE & BOB LAYTON**
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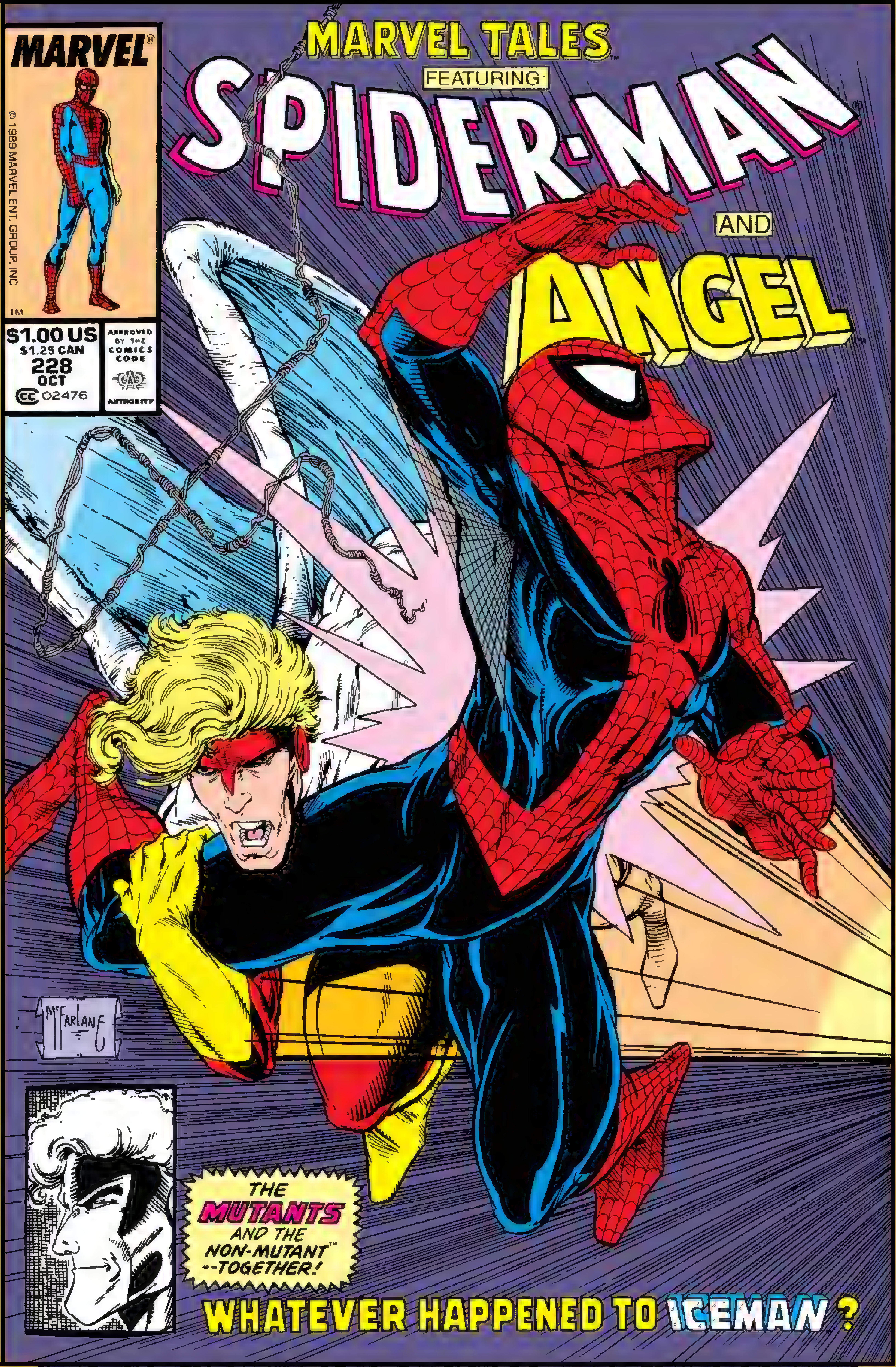
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THE MUTANTS AND THE NON-MUTANT™ --TOGETHER!
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ICEMAN?

Marvel Tales #228 reprinted *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man #17*.
Cover art by **TODD McFARLANE**.

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NON-MUTANT
A MUTANT GONE MAD!
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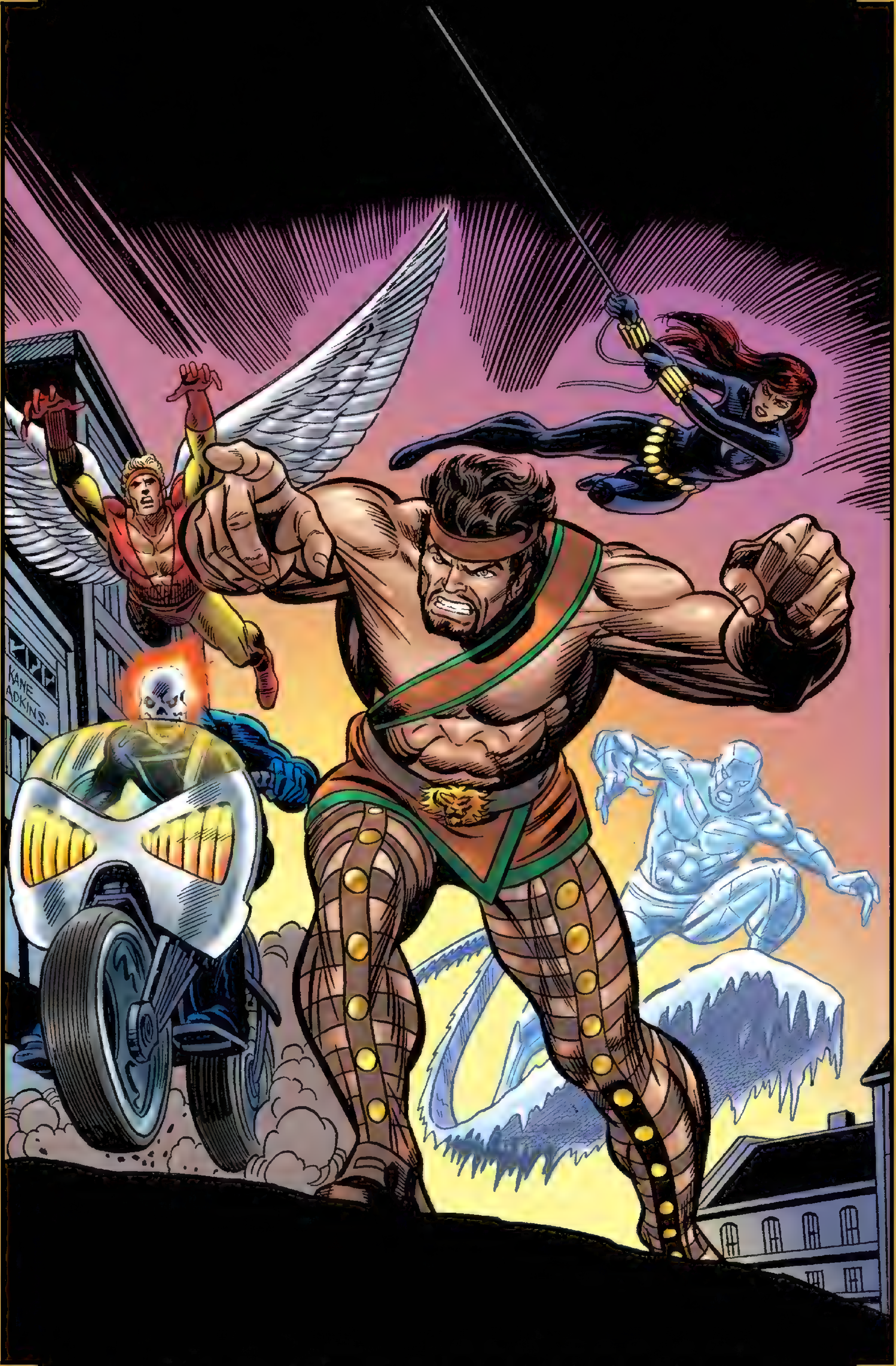
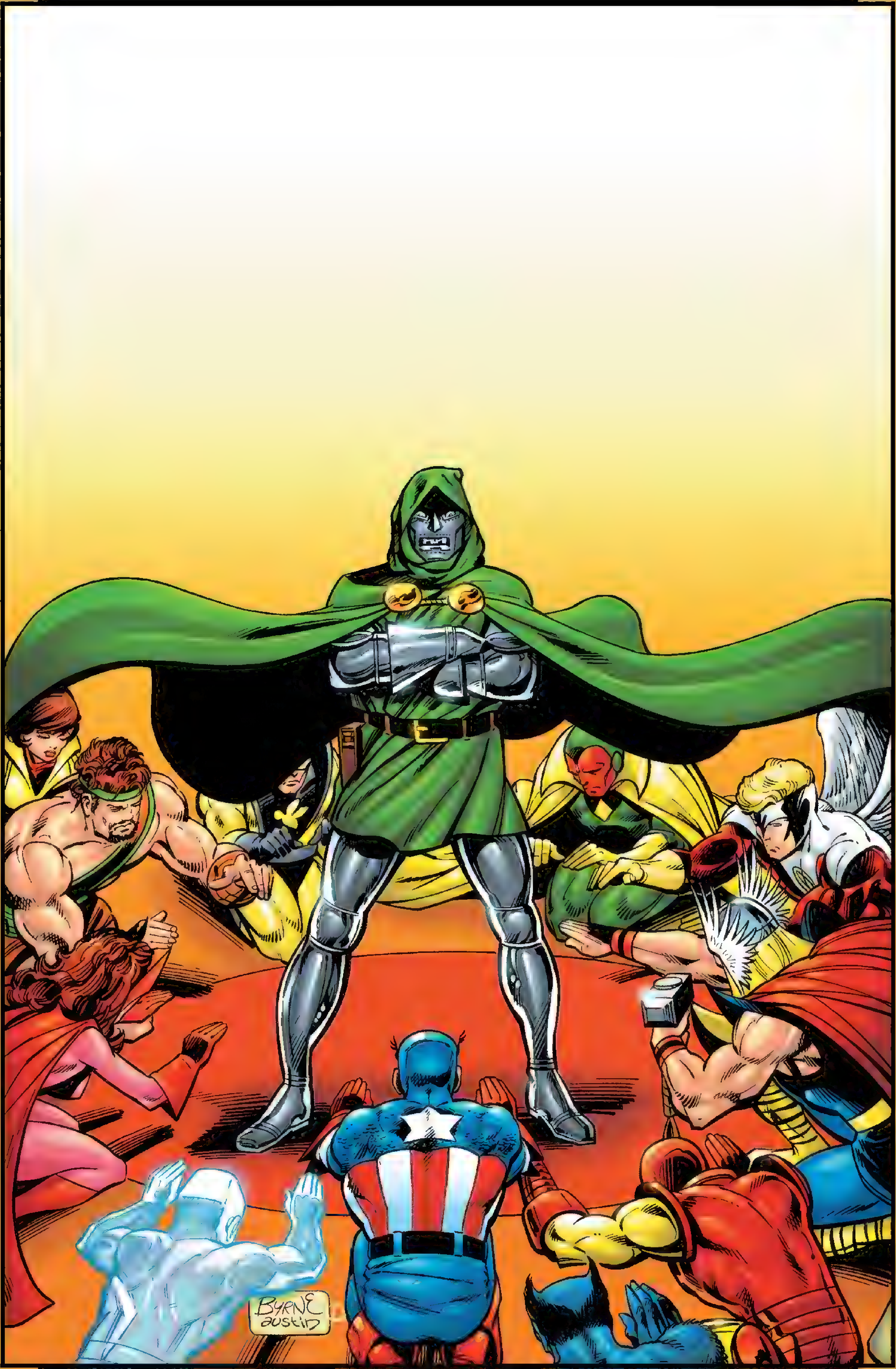
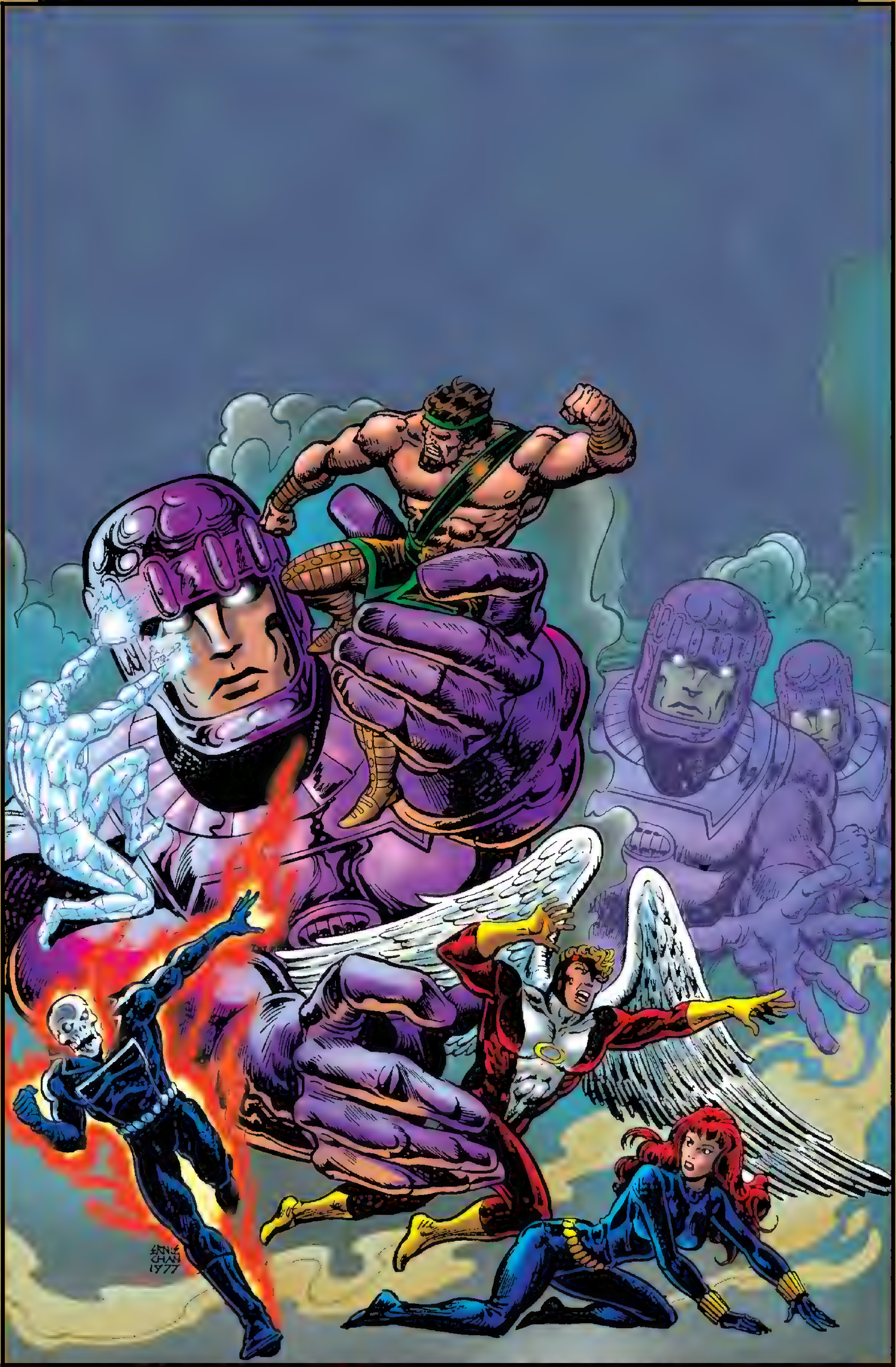
Marvel Tales #229 reprinted *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man #18*.
Cover art by **TODD McFARLANE**.


KANE ADKINS.

Champions Classic Vol. 1 TPB cover art by **GIL KANE, DAN ADKINS & TOM SMITH**

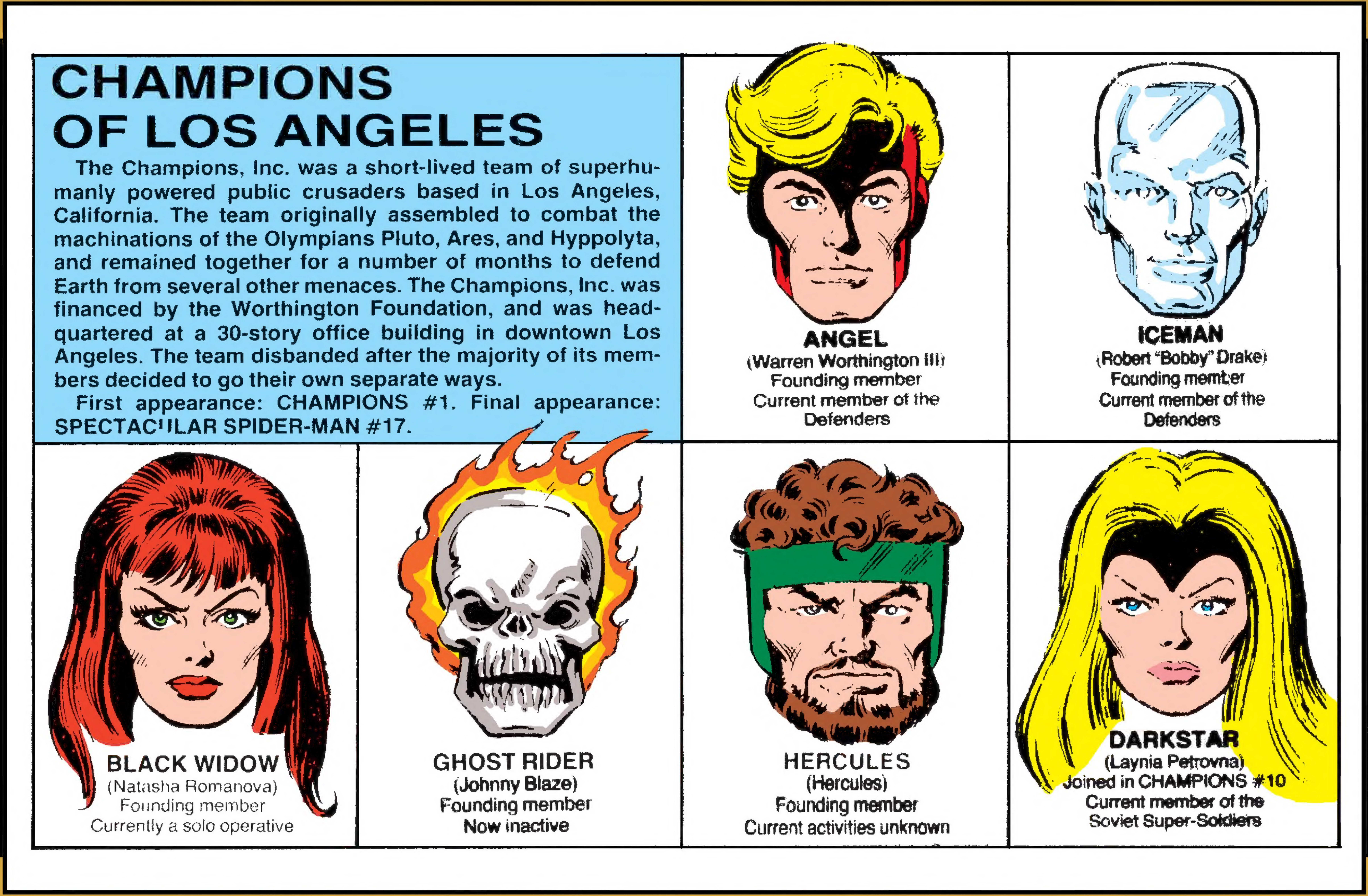

BYRNE
austin

Essential Super-Villain Team-Up TPB back-cover art by
JOHN BYRNE, TERRY AUSTIN & AVALON'S DAN KEMP


ERNIE CHAN 1977

Champions Classic Vol. 2 TPB cover art by **ERNIE CHAN & TOM SMITH**

Essential Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man Vol. 1 TPB back-cover art by
GIL KANE & AVALON'S ANDY TROY



CHAMPIONS OF LOS ANGELES

The Champions, Inc. was a short-lived team of superhumanly powered public crusaders based in Los Angeles, California. The team originally assembled to combat the machinations of the Olympians Pluto, Ares, and Hyppolyta, and remained together for a number of months to defend Earth from several other menaces. The Champions, Inc. was financed by the Worthington Foundation, and was headquartered at a 30-story office building in downtown Los Angeles. The team disbanded after the majority of its members decided to go their own separate ways.

First appearance: CHAMPIONS #1. Final appearance: SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #17.

ANGEL
(Warren Worthington III)
Founding member
Current member of the Defenders

ICEMAN
(Robert "Bobby" Drake)
Founding member
Current member of the Defenders

BLACK WIDOW
(Natasha Romanova)
Founding member
Currently a solo operative

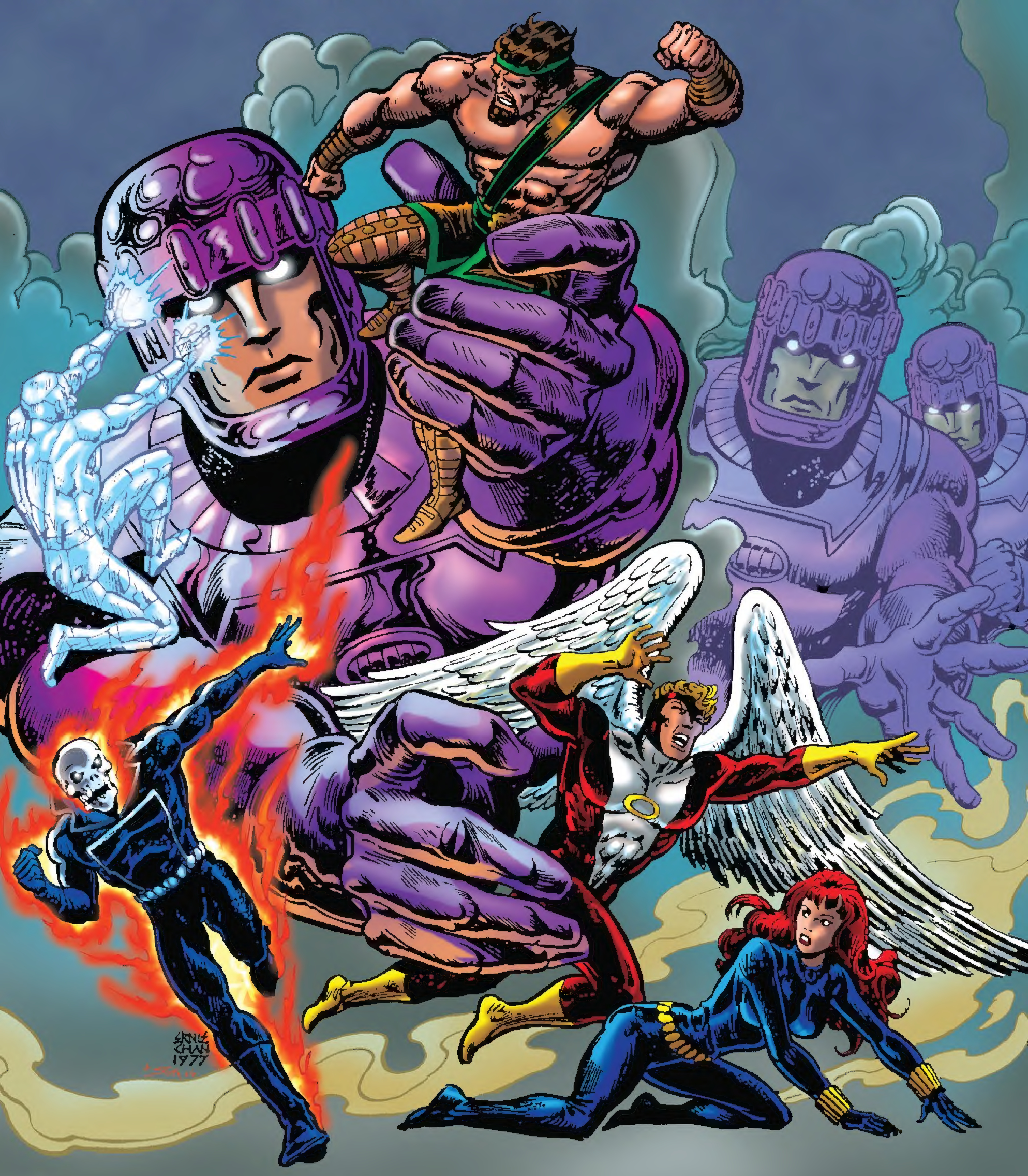
GHOST RIDER
(Johnny Blaze)
Founding member
Now inactive

HERCULES
(Hercules)
Founding member
Current activities unknown

DARKSTAR
(Laynia Petrovna)
Joined in CHAMPIONS #10
Current member of the Soviet Super-Soldiers

Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe (1983) #13 profile — art by
BOB BUDIANSKY, JOSEF RUBINSTEIN & ANDY YANCHUS

JOIN BLACK WIDOW, HERCULES, GHOST RIDER, ICEMAN AND ANGEL AS THEY FORM AN ALL-NEW SUPER-TEAM!



Savor every issue, every highlight, every page as the lives of these Marvel icons play out together! Their struggles will reveal the origin of the man who created the Black Widow, pit them against the combined might of Magneto and Doctor Doom, unleash the Crimson Dynamo and Titanium Man on Los Angeles, and team them with the Stranger in the fight for an Infinity Gem. Featuring some of fan-favorite artist John Byrne's greatest early work, including stories featuring the Sentinels and Brotherhood of Evil Mutants!

Collecting *Champions (1975) #1-17*; *Iron Man Annual #4*; *Avengers (1963) #163*; *Super-Villain Team-Up #14*; *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man (1976) #17-18*; and *Hulk Annual #7* — written by Tony Isabella, Bill Mantlo, Chris Claremont, Jim Shooter, John Byrne and Roger Stern; and illustrated by Don Heck, George Tuska, Bob Hall, John Byrne and Sal Buscema.

T

MARVEL

ZONE